

Northwest PA BBVS Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting – November 3, 2022

Present- via Teams:

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Chris Cowan.

Roll call – No sign-in sheet as meeting was held virtually.

Chris sent out minutes of the August 4, 20022 meeting.

Minutes of the August 4, 2022 meeting were not able to be approved as we did not have a quorum. Approval has been tabled until the next meeting.

BBVS Report

Chris: We are well on our way to meeting our goals for the fiscal year, we are at 37% already; getting people into employment, helping ILOB customers, and working with the kids in the SS-C program. One of the things that I think has really helped us is that we are at pretty much full staffing right now, with the exception of an O&M Instructor and a District Administrator. Since I am Acting District Administrator, we have not filled that position. For O&M, we have posted again, the posting is scheduled to come down next week, and we were able to post for both an O&M Instructor and an O&M Intern. Our person in Central Office who does recruiting has been reaching out to the schools to help fill this position. We are not the only office having difficulty filling the instructor position, so it has been a difficult road to try to provide this service, but we are thankful that we do have a contractor who is able to work our northwest counties. We do utilize the O&M instruction at Keystone on occasion, but she is very busy serving her customers. We continue to have our VRTs in customers' homes doing what they can to teach safe travel in the home. They are not able to teach cane training, but can provide some protective techniques, stair training, any type of safety regarding travel in their homes. VR is able to do some minimal contracting with our contractors. We are trying to do the best we can with not having anyone in that position. Hopeful we have some people on list when the posting comes down and we can hire in the near future.

We have participated in several NDEAM (National Disability Employment Awareness Month) events. We worked with the DuBois BVRs office, participated in events in CareerLinks in Elk, Potter, Cameron, McKean, Jefferson, and Clearfield counties. Staff talked about our services and demonstrated some of the Assistive Technology that our customers use; it was a really successful event. We had some great feedback from Potter County, very appreciative. Shelley Rhodes interacted with someone who came to the event, gave him some very encouraging feedback, showed him what we could help him with, took a referral from him, and we are going to hopefully start serving him.

We also did a training event at the Erie CareerLink; Devon Haemer, and Shelley Rhodes went into the CareerLink and did a brief training on ZoomText and Jaws, so if customers come into the CareerLink, they can get access to these services.

We did have the children's summer instruction program at our office, had four students, ages 7-12, where they worked with the VRTs on some Independent Living skills, some cooking, and handwriting things. One of the things that was cool, a couple of the older girls were asking about makeup techniques, and we were able to justify this under Hygiene as the girls were very interested in doing that. We could relate this to going on job interviews, etc., and just part of being a teenage young lady, so we added that into the group instruction. The one younger boy was not really into it, but the girls loved it, so we found some other things for the boy to do while they were working on that, and it all went over well. We talked to all the students at the end of the three-day program, and they were super excited about coming to it, and excited about next year. We are hoping to expand this, to add 14 and 15-year-olds next year. In fact, we had a meeting about it this week so we can plan for it and talked about how we may have to break out into a couple of different age groups. We have lots of thoughts as to how we can do this program with a wide range of ages; we are excited. We have also had input from the TVI's as to what they don't have time to work with the students on, such as social cues, and conversations. We got some great suggestions, so I excited to see what the VRTs come up with for a curriculum next summer.

Priscilla: What age group would this be for if you expand the program?

Chris: We would stop at age 15, but we have another program for kids who are 16-22 that we are going to be running next summer. The Envision Success Program is limited to age 15, so ages 7 to 15. We are planning on June 27-29th, 2023 for the Envision Success Program for next summer.

We have already been in talks with the City of Erie to start a MY (Municipalities and Youth) Work Summer Internship. This would be a paid work program that we would partner with the municipality and job coaching services to get the clients paid work experience. Traditionally this has been a 4-to-8-week program, where they would be doing some traditionally outside work, but some of them have done work in the offices. We have met with the City of Erie, and they are very welcoming to have this program; they have already agreed to hosting it, and our students would be working in the offices with the city employees, doing all kinds of different duties, not sure exactly what yet, still in the early planning. The biggest thing is the city has offered to host it; we have talked to the mayor and his reps. We are very excited; we have four students already who are interested in participating. Where we are at right now is finding a job coaching provider; they would help to train the students, would stay on the job site to give support, and would act as a supervisor on the job site. They would be working hand in hand with the student to help them be successful. We are super excited; this is a great opportunity to get our students working in City Hall and doing some jobs and working hand in hand with city staff. The more exposure we can get with our kids in the work environment is great, but this is also a chance to have the general population work alongside the visually impaired population; definitely a win-win. BVRs did do some sites this past year, and this will be the first BBVS site that we have had statewide. We did have a couple of students participate in the BVRs sites last year, none were out of our office, but this will be the actual first inclusive BBVS site, where it is students from our bureau, so we are super excited about that. There will be more to come as we get more information about that.

Priscilla: When you met with IU5, were any students from Crawford County?

Chris: We did Erie and Crawford County, but we only had four students at the time, and they were all from Erie County. We did not have anyone from Crawford County this year.

Priscila: Our Keystone Kids' program is busy this year, working on that, and we would be very happy to have some Crawford County kids, but they need to get referred to us.

Chris: We can talk with our social workers and make sure we are providing your information to the parents, so we can make those referrals.

Priscilla: We can send you our Calendar of Events and descriptions, etc. so you let the parents know.

Chris: Yes, please send that information to Alecia or myself.

Priscilla: Are you meeting any more with IU16?

Chris: We keep trying to schedule but have not had a date yet to reschedule.

Priscilla: Have you met with IU5?

Chris: Yes, it was a great meeting, had a lot of success.

Priscilla: Can you see if you can get me invited to the IU5 meeting?

Chris: Yes, I can ask to get you invited.

Venango County Association of the Blind (VCAB)

Krysta: There has been a been a lot going on around here. As you may know we all got tech grants; we had an event last month that we ran sort of like speed dating and called it "Date a Device", and we had different stages set up and clients and the community could come in and they basically spent four to five minutes at a device, saw what It can and can't do, and rotated to the next device. This was a way to engage clients in the tech that we had purchased with our grant money and allow them to get their hands on the devices and see what might work for them.

After that, we had a second day where people that wanted more time with the device came in and got to spend one-on-one time with the device. The events were very helpful to let everyone see what is out there and try them out. Someone came in with his checkbook, and put it under the device, and was able to write his first check in 15-20 years. He was so excited. We had a husband and wife come in and try a wearable, and they got to see each other for the first time in years. The events were really successful in letting them know the things we have in the Tech Center now and let them experience that.

We did just get a wheelchair van in September; we were able to finally procure that and can now provide services to folks that we have not been able to do in quite some time.

For the future, we are restructuring some things, and moving ahead to see what our next project might be.

Chris: That is great news about your Tech Event and the van. Just wanted to make you aware that as you have customers' come in, we do have limited funds in Independent Living Older Blind, but we do provide CCTVs, etc. Please put us at the top of list of service providers

Krysta: We were talking about our tech grant, and nobody was excited, and the "Date the Device" idea just popped out and we decided to give it a try, and it worked so well! People were able to tell pretty quick if it worked for them or not. They were able to move from device to device until they hopefully found something that worked for them, and the excitement was just something we haven't seen in a long time.

Oil Valley Chapter for the Blind

No report.

Keystone Blind Association

Jenn: We had IDEAL in full capacity, 11 students, ranging in age from 15-20; we take ages 14 to 21. The 11 students were heavily from the Philadelphia area, but we had a couple from Harrisburg and Wilkes-Barre districts as well. During IDEAL, the students did college tours at a private institute, community college, and a state university, Kutztown. They really enjoyed the tours, and were able to see difference in accessibility, and the way each of those institutions would be ran. We also did tours of employment sites, including a call center in Philadelphia; InspiriTec. The head of IT at InspiriTec was visually impaired and was asked a million questions about that. We also toured some other employment sites, even as far as the toilet paper factory that is out there that is more structured. The students had their five core classes and seemed to enjoy them. They each received an iPad for the classes, and if they could use them successfully, they were allowed to keep them at the end of IDEAL. We viewed this as a tool in their toolbox for the future. They were able to utilize the iPad in the classes and the dorms.

We are working on partnering with Salus University for low vision evaluations at the beginning so that we can kind of narrow down their low vision needs and work with Salus for some additional low vision supports.

Keystone Kids is up and running and growing, had four new students this fall, ages 5-15; we will take up to high school seniors in the program. We work on different things with different students, different events, and different skill areas.

This weekend we are working on Thanksgiving events, which includes helping with the community, so they are going to have some fun activities in the office, but they are also doing crafts for the residents of a local nursing home as well. We will be working on food prep, crafts, and food they have prepared.

We are working on prepping for IDEAL, working on the kids' program for the summer, a specialized program.

As far as adults, the low vision clinic is very busy, lots of referrals from all over; Dr. Freeman has been up quite a bit.

Regarding our rehab services, we are still working with our adult clients, doing cooking classes; they really seem to be enjoying them.

We have a cooking class Beaver County today, had one in Mercer County yesterday, and will have ones in Lawrence County and Crawford County starting in December. I facilitate the class, help with all areas, such as cooking, utilizing devices. The classes are driven by client interest, such as if they are interested in the air fryer, we might have one session that is all made in the air fryer.

We do a full course in a class period so they see what can be made in the device. Today, we are doing crockpot cooking.

Chris: I wanted to offer up, if there is any time you are looking for guest speakers or help with mock interviews, etc., please get in touch with either Cassie, Alecia, or myself. We are happy to come down and help with that; we love the Keystone Kids program.

If you hear of any kids in Crawford County, we would love to see them benefit from all of the services that we both have to offer. I can't believe we have no kids in Crawford County.

Priscilla: Any kids in Mercer County and Venango as well.

Krysta: We can't commit to transfer, but might be able to do a Meet the Parents event, etc.

Jenn: We have been able to work it out where the parents will meet us closer to the PA line, so we can try to work on transportation.

Krysta: If we had more kids within our service area, it would be helpful but right now I know of only two.

Krysta: Jenn, how do you do the crockpot cooking classes?

Jenn: I go over the pros and cons of using the device, and I prepared what they were eating yesterday. The clients yesterday will prepare the food for the clients today. You are all welcome to come see the cooking class anytime, to see what we are doing. Usually, the classes are on a Wednesday and Thursday, but as I have all four counties it will probably be more.

Priscilla: We did have a similar plan to do a presentation, a big presentation, and bring clients in from this side of the state, show them the different devices we have, do an expo and demonstration. However, the date that we set was December 7th, and that is board meeting day, so we had to delay the presentation, but we are still planning on doing something on that order.

We have everything for our counties, mini labs at all of the counties, where clients can work, learn, and experience. The majority of our devices are actual tech, such as computer, iPad, Alexia, scanners, etc. We do have a few low vision devices, but all but one are OCR. We did get a Ruby as it is probably the most popular in general as it is portable. We want to extend invitations to your folks as well, Chris. Our offices are there, the equipment is there, the staff is there to at least do some demo; actual trainings are done by the professionals in the field.

The other big news here is our Assistive Technology specialist, Jane, has taken another job, has nothing to do with AT. But we are on it, we hope that we have a lead on someone who has some training, and will be able to continue to do trainings and get things going. Our current clients who are using tech, if someone is really struggling, a referral will be made to our CAT program on the other side of the state. The CAT program will work with them virtually, and if not, our staff here will coordinate a time with our CAT department so they can work them through whatever the problem is.

I am hoping to have the position filled by the beginning of the year. Cassie, I believe Jane wrapped up one client, as the client was very capable to do virtual work,

Cassie: I will let counselor know.

Chris- When you get the new person in place, we would be happy to come down and meet them and tell them about our services, etc.

Regarding fundraisers, we are continuing to look for employees; we need people in the back here, we are overwhelmed, had to add another production line in the facility. We need employees, but they have to be legally blind, but preferably have some usable vision. Our orders skyrocketed. We are also continuing to look for people for the Boyer's contract.

Cassie: We have a counselor who is new, could you send me job descriptions, current jobs, contact info, etc., so she can look into referrals.

Priscilla: Referrals run through our HR department. We made arrangements with our production supervisor in the back to bring in clients who were interested in working that so they could have hands-on experience on what they might be doing, which was very helpful. If you have some people who might fit the bill, we might be able to do something like that. It is harder to describe Boyers, and get people in, as it is a secure facility. The two guys who work Boyer's can describe the positions really well.

Chris: If you are able to get some of that info to us, I'll share it with the Pittsburgh office; might be able to pull some people to help you guys out with employees.

Priscilla: We actually have some people who have relocated to Butler, or travel to Butler as we have a transportation service that helps out. Boyers have actually been able to identify some jobs for people with no vision.

Chris: Maybe we can get a tour scheduled for our VR counselors to see your site and the Boyer site?

Priscilla: That would be the best idea as it is impossible to describe.

We are looking for a fiscal person as well.

Also, want to make sure that you know we have the rest areas, 179 and 80, and the Driver's License Centers, some of the jobs do not have to have vision, but if someone has enough vision, they may be eligible for those jobs. One of our clients had a relative who worked at the rest area, and she wanted to try it, and did well, but it was seasonal only.

Chris: If we get info out to Rob Hodapp, the Eastern Regional Service rep for OVR, he covers BBVS and BVRS, maybe we can get people from the Eastern side of the state

Priscilla: we do have a hiring incentive and relocation incentive.

Priscilla: It was a banner year for IDEAL, but we understand that you guys are doing Summer Academy at Kutztown this year? Is that going to happen?

Chris: They are planning to do Summer Academy, but nothing has been decided on the site. They have talked to Penn State and Kutztown, but we have not been involved in the planning process.

Priscilla: We had a lot of kids referred from Hadley, each program offers something a little bit different, and there is value in all the programs; hopefully that comes to fruition.

Chris: It is hard to get our kids to go to Philadelphia, but it is a really great program.

Priscilla: We do a spring weekend so the kids can see what it is like to be away from home; at no charge.

Chris: Let us know about it, and we will get the information out.

Julie: Regarding Lawrence County Keystone and piggybacking off the CareerLink asking you to network with them, we had two clients from the Primary Health Network. They had clients actually go through taking a covid test that they supplied, walking them through taking the test, also had a mini support group on getting the test read, smart devices, apps, reaching out to the staff at Keystone.

Second, we had someone in talking to clients about diabetes, and we are using him again in February. They brought in "A community health worker", they help clients in Primary Health Network, filling out applications for LHEAP, etc., in our counties that they service.

I asked her if their staff is taught how to guide someone who is visually impaired, and she said "No". She asked if we could do a Zoom call to give her staff basic skills in guiding someone, and how to talk to the person with the visual impairment, and not their support staff.

Priscilla: We provided info on how to address someone with a visual impairment, and they are having some training and time to be introduced to the technology we have, etc. when they are working with their clients, so they know what is available.

Chris: Raedine is out of Mercer County, she could come in to coordinate things, as could any staff.

The Sight Center of Northwest PA

No report

PaRC Report

No report

Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania (ACBP)

No report

Governor's Committee on Disabilities

No Report

Old Business

None

New Business

Tentative dates for next year's CAC meetings were discussed and the dates of Jan 26th, 2023, April 20th, 2023, July 20th, 2023, and November 2nd, 2023, were chosen. Chris will send out these dates and if there is a conflict the meetings can be rescheduled.

Next Meeting – January 26th, 2023; Chris will send invitations out.

Motion to Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:22 a.m. by Priscilla, seconded by Julie.