

Northwest PA BBVS Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting – August 4, 2022

Present- via Teams:

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| Chris Cowan, Acting District Administrator, BBVS | 814-871-4401 | ccowan@pa.gov |
| Amy Adams, Clerical Assistant III, BBVS | 814-871-4401 | amyadams@pa.gov |
| Jeanne Hink, Keystone Blind Association | 724-347-5011 | jhink@keystoneblind.org |
| Priscilla Earhart, Keystone Blind Association | 724-347-5011 | PEarhart@KeystoneBlind.org |
| Linda Moore, The Sight Center of NWPA | 814-455-0995 | lindam@sightcenternwpa.org |
| Heidi Tuszynski | | heidituszynski@gmail.com |

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. by Chris Cowan

Roll call – No Sign-In sheet as meeting was held virtually.

Chris sent out minutes of the April 14, 2022 meeting.

Minutes of the April 14, 2022 meeting – Motion to approve by Priscilla, seconded by Jeanne Hicks

BBVS Report (Chris)

Goals: Our new goals for the fiscal year started in July 2022. Last fiscal year we met all goals except the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, mainly due to short staff. We only had one VR counselor for half the year, and it was difficult to meet the goals with only one counselor. The goals were based on having three counselors. We did get halfway to our goal, and helped 26 people return to successful employment, which was a great thing. Lots of work by the counselor and the supervisor on the customer's behalf. ILOB we were able to help 117 people meet their IL goal, and in VRT we helped 155 people meet goals. Overall office circumstances prevented VR closure goals. We have new goals for this year, coming up, and we have already closed three people in the first month, with successful employment outcome.

Staffing: Vacancies – We are at full staff in the VRC unit, the SW unit, and the VRT unit. We have interviewed twice for the O&M position, but we have not been able to fill it. We had two candidates, but they did not accept the job, either because they were already working, or we could not meet the salary requirement. The second candidate took a job with the VA.

We are in the process of reposting that position again, to do rounds of interview of Orientation and Mobility Instructor and Orientation and Mobility Intern. We are going to post to see if we can get an intern to come in to work the caseload with minimal supervision. Once the intern met the requirements, we would bring them on as a full O&M instructor.

Priscilla: How would the intern be supervised? By an advisor?

Chris: They could be supervisor by an advisor or another instructor, or a specialist in Central Office maybe. We would have some options, and would do some creative thinking for supervision, but we are in a situation that we could provide that supervision.

Priscilla: You said not being permitted to contract for O&M for outside services for the older blind. How are they able to do that, and what if the person is at a danger situation without having O&M?

Chris: I think we try to do what we can with our VRTs, in home safety things, but because of the budget in the IL Program, we are not able to do contracted O&M. The money that we have is really set up for the low vision evaluations, glasses, etc.

If there was a really extreme circumstance, then I could take that to Dawn, who is the Bureau Director, and talk about that case, but in general terms we don't do contracting with the IL Program.

Heidi: I do have a suggestion; some guide dog schools will do O&M, they can go out, but they do not have to take a dog. I will also see what I can do on the advocacy part, make some suggestions in the governor's office, and maybe over to DHS.

Priscilla: Luanne is available for now to help, but once school year starts, she will have less availability.

Chris: We appreciate Luanne. We do have a person who contracts for us, who is out of New York, but she will come into Erie, but those are the VR customers. She will take about 5-7 cases at a time and works with them and helps them. We do appreciate being able to contract with a couple people when able.

Heidi: They need to get the salary up.

Chris: We need to try to recruit from the high school level. Once they have the classification, they have the ability to go where the money is. I asked OA if we could negotiate salary, but the answer was No.

Priscilla: You are obligated to provide goals for these people, and they need to fund the rehab!

Chris: Part of the issue is that it is a bargaining unit position, so that adds a whole other factor to it.

Children's Program: This is coming up next week, the first since starting back out of Covid-19. We originally had six kids that were going to come in and work with the VRTs for three days, and it is down to four kids at this point. Linda and the Sight Center are providing transportation for students to get to our office. The VRTs are going to be working with them on several different independent living skills, a little bit of Access Technology stuff, cooking, and healthy living. We have a person coming in who is a retired health teacher, to teach about healthy living. We are very excited to be coming out of pandemic and having the Children's Program again; this program is limited to the Specialized Services kids, so kids under 14. This year's program the kids are 9-12. We really appreciate The Sight Center helping with transportation.

Linda: We are happy to do it but will need to talk about billing structure due to the increase in gas prices.

Summer Academy: We have some good news about the Summer Academy Program; we are in the process of restarting this program. We did this program at State College for numerous years. We are looking at different sites to hold that program, looking at bringing it back. I believe they are trying to get everything together to hold it next summer. It usually takes place in late June. It is all going to depend on if they can get contracts in place once the location is finalized. This is for high school students, 9-12th grade, looking at potential Associates Degrees, Bachelor's Degrees. We are excited to be looking at the Summer Academy again.

CareerLink: We are partnering with CareerLinks in the area, and reaching out to other CareerLinks, to give an overview of Jaws, ZoomText, and other assistive tech they might have in their location. If customers come in, their staff can get the Jaws working, ZoomText working etc., so anyone who needs that AT in the CareerLink would have it. We are very excited to be going out to the CareerLinks.

White Cane Events: We wanted to ask about White Cane Events, and if you are planning any of those, we would be happy to look and see if we could join you and support you in those events. If you are thinking or planning, and want to include us, we would be happy to attend those events.

Priscilla: We are asking our other counties to start planning a White Cane Day event so you will probably be hearing from us.

Chris: We are glad to get out there and support you. Oil City has done a walk in previous years, and we are ready to get back to those.

Venango County Association of the Blind (VCAB)

No report.

Oil Valley Chapter for the Blind

No report.

Keystone Blind Association (Priscilla)

We are wrapping up our IDEAL Program, had 11 students this year, which is the most we have had in forever. All the students are from this area of the state; some of the kids are college bound, some are work force bound. They did come to us with a lot of medical issues and other things, but they have done extremely well. Staff handled it extremely well. I have been out there this whole last week, helping in the dorm, etc. We had our third college visit today. They have had really great experience, visited InspiriTec, which was very exciting. The students saw where they would need to hone their skills in order to work. The students all had different levels of ability.

In two weeks, we are having our other kids' program on the other side of the state. This program is very targeted towards O&M, VRT, Access Technology.

We received an AT grant, and trying to figure out how that is going to play out has been really fun. We have our computers, and have selected pieces of LV equipment, for demonstration only.

We got typeability, for some to learn and others to brush up on skills. We have computers at every county, for practice and training, to help customers make a better decision about computers or get BBVS to help them. The first step is to get customers to see what is available and what they might be able to do with help and get them with the specialists to get them honing those skills.

Vision Bowl is going on all over the place. VCAP is doing a golf outing. We have our big event, The Sizzler, the first week of October.

We are still looking for legally blind for the Boyer's contract; need about four more people. We do relocation and sign-on bonuses.

The Sight Center of Northwest PA (Linda)

We had a great Save an Eye game last week. Erie Lions Club has put on a high school All Star charity game for 84 years, and The Sight Center has been a part of that for 84 years. We had over 3000 people there. We had a banquet the night before, 66 players with families, coaches, the media, etc., media; it was quite the extravaganza.

Chris: This is a very special event, my son played in it one year; it is an honor to be involved. This is the second oldest game of its type in the nation; Lancaster is the first, and it is one year older.

Linda: We had the best game, spent 22,000 less to put game on. This game raises a lot of money for children's eye care, vision screening, kids camp. We donated a Braille Note as the big gift this year. Last year our big gift was bigger, a communication device for a young man, who is blind and deaf, and mildly autistic, which cost nearly 10,000 dollars.

The young man who received the Braille Note came to the office yesterday to show us how he is already using it. The Lion's Club gives The Sight Center \$20-25,000 a year from proceeds of game. The game is a very special deal, and takes a lot to put it together; we have cheerleaders, marching band, etc.

Chris, thanks for sending staff to The Sight Center to see about starting a Call Center. The brakes are on that for now, as the board members are businesspeople and they have questions the consultant has not been able to answer yet. I do believe we are going to go forward, but we need to get questions answered. I would like to meet with Chris to talk more about this.

Chris: Let's look at scheduling and set up something. We are looking forward to supporting The Sight Center once it is up and running.

Priscilla: We are looking into possibly doing a Call Center as well.

Linda: I would be happy to talk to you about this, and have you talk with our consultant. I would love to go through this together. I would be happy to share information and costs etc. with you.

Linda: I have been trying to get a couple of consumers to come to these meetings.

Priscilla: I have one, I will get you the contact info; they can do Zoom now or join on their iPad or computer.

Linda: Let's make it a goal that everyone brings two consumers to the November meeting.

Chris: Should I send out the CAC brochure as an attachment?

Linda/Priscilla: Yes. (Linda and Priscilla will send consumer contact information to Chris.)

PaRC Report (Heidi)

I am no longer on the PaRC, but I did ask them to share the report, and I will share it once I get it.

(Please see the attached report: [PA Rehabilitation Council \(PaRC\) Report to the OVR State Board June 2022](#))

I am pushing some consumer groups, hopefully the new administration will share groups.

Training the staff at CareerLink to help with ZoomText, Jaws, etc. is a great idea; they need it. My daughter works at CareerLink, and she has heard me scream at Zoom, etc. My daughter has brought these concerns to her boss, and I have offered to go in and give my thoughts on aspects. Hopefully things get better with the CareerLinks.

Chris: This is beneficial to the consumers, and anyone that uses AT. Administration has changed so much in the CareerLink offices, so trying to keep a partnership together with them is really important.

Heidi: Steven has taken over the National Federation for the Blind in Erie, and wants to do a White Cane Day, something other than the Roundabout. He is trying to build the chapter, with some younger people as well.

Chris: If he wants to send information when he is having a meeting to me or Cassie, we would be happy to send it out to customers.

Heidi: He kind of wants to start a younger group of people who are blind, do a little more to get people out, make connections. There is a lot of past drama, so with starting a new group, maybe he can get past that.

Heidi: I did hear the Ability One contractors are negotiating the contract at Employment First and trying to get rid of that 75%. They have to look at some of these older regulations.

Priscilla: That 75% really makes us work hard to fulfill, but if it goes away, I am really fearful of what happens then. We are constantly looking for legally blind or blind who can do the job. We have a lot of younger people who have vision issues but don't meet the definitions.

Heidi: What about Call Centers? There are a lot of lot of vendors who do state contracts.

Priscilla: There is a lot that goes into the call center, but we wanted to do this as we have a lot of people who have excellent skills.

Chris: Even looking at the Employment First, it has to be an integrative work setting; how do we describe that now, coming out of the pandemic? We are teleworking, part time; how do you say that is an integrative work setting? The work force has really changed in the last couple of years.

Heidi: That is a new perspective, and with the fear with Covid-19, transportation issues, etc., it is hard to get people out in the work force.

Priscilla – Work from home might be good for people with vision issues, as there is less fear of Covid-19, no transportation issues, etc.

Heidi: OVR is supposed to be getting some big grant money, and looking at grants, programs to do, etc., would they fund Call Centers to get people employed? Is this feasible?

Priscilla: Benefits counselors would be great! Our HR does the best they can to help people work through the questions, but they are limited in what they can do as they are not specialists.

Chris: We do contract for benefits counseling to all our VR customers. We would not be against having someone on staff that could do that.

PaRC just got a bunch of new people, so they are just learning their jobs, so not a lot is coming out yet. They have been looking at a lot of policies, etc. We will see what changes there are when the next administration come in. We need to spend the money, get those services, get people working.

Chris: I think some of the things we have done, and our director Ryan hide has done, such as working with the council, not considering the expected family contribution, etc. has allowed us to provide for some of the students and spend some of that money in innovative ways.

Heidi: I will ask if there is any way to get some funding for O&M for the ILOB program; it doesn't hurt to ask. There is a person doing some recruitment, and they are recruiting O&M interns, which could be supervised over Zoom, colleges are doing it all the time.

Governor's Committee on Disabilities

No Report

Next Meeting

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 3, 2022. Chris will send out the meeting minutes, agenda, and new invites.

Motion to Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m. by Priscilla, seconded by Heidi