

Harrisburg District Office Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting  
Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and  
Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services  
September 20, 2022

In attendance in person or on the phone:

John Horst, Acting Chair

Cathy Long, Secretary, CAC

Patrick Kane, VR Supervisor, BVRS and CAC liaison representing BVRS

Cynthia Gibbs-Pratt, customer, BBVS

Nan Seidenberg presenter today, Orientation and Mobility Specialist, BBVS. Serves Cumberland, York and Adams Counties.

Natalie Barbush, BBVS Social work Supervisor and BBVS CAC liaison

Joan Myers Goodman

Bobby Goss

Iasha Reikert

Jim Whitonis, VR Specialist, Central Office

Approval of minutes for June 2022 meeting. Minutes approved as disseminated.

Pat reviewed the process of reaching out to customers to alert them about these CAC meetings and invite them to join. Initially a letter to every customer in active status in BVRS and BBVS was sent a letter in the mail. That was a costly endeavor for the Commonwealth, and occasionally new people showed up. Now invitations are sent by email and the CAC liaisons on the BVRS and BBVS side send them out. Email is free and that does not use up clerical time folding papers, stuffing envelopes, and labeling envelopes. This is a win all around. Anyone in CWDS should have some kind of an associated email address with the account. We are happy when people come to meetings and hope those who do come find the information disseminated helpful.

Next, we heard from Nan Seidenberg, Orientation and Mobility Specialist, who gave a great presentation. She told us how she became interested in this field, the training she pursued to prepare for this career, and an overview of what a person who agrees to work with her and/or other specialists will learn. Of course, each person's goal is individualized. The assessment is carried out and the first thing Nan shows her customers is how to walk with her using the Human Guide Technique. This puts the guide a step or two ahead of the person being guided. I personally teach Human Guide to people who want to help me and I'm pretty sure that about 80% of my church is proficient in guiding me, especially around crowds of people standing around socializing. I do use a mobility cane and always have it with me, but human guide helps me not tap someone's leg in front of me or embarrass myself by running into the back of someone standing still, etc. All the medical personnel who deal with me regularly know this Human Guide Technique and use it efficiently. Nan also helps a person's family learn this technique. Included in this instruction is how to walk together through narrow passageways or through doorways.

Nan teaches O&M terminology and gave a brief history of how this profession started. It started in Avon, Connecticut a sort of rehabilitation center for men coming back from war blinded. She says the time of the assessment is one of the most emotional times the instructor will ever spend with the customer. Soon hope takes hold and the customer is willing to work to reach mobility goals. It is never easy and always frightening but definitely worth it. I loved her presentation and enjoyed it again as I prepared these minutes. If I needed O&M assistance, I

would not hesitate to work with this fine example of an Orientation and Mobility Specialist. We had a time of sharing when two of us gave a short overview of our experience as people who are blind who use the mobility cane.

BVRS report: Pat Kane. We meet in June for our last meeting. June 30 is the end of our state fiscal year. 255 cases were closed in VR and the goal was 265, or 96%. COVID still is affecting workflow. People returned to the office in April, 2022. Prior to that they were working remotely from their homes. On the BBVS side, the VRT (Vision Rehabilitation Teachers) and O&M (Orientation and Mobility Instructors) cannot instruct remotely. There are just some things that must be handled in person, so this hiatus where customers and instructors could not meet together, but only could meet remotely jeopardized the goal numbers and everything had to occur slower. Things are back to normal, reported Pat. Our new goal for the 2022-2023 rating period is 269 cases. We are in the second month of this. By December when we meet again, we should see some good numbers.

Last summer BVRS worked with students in transition. They had two "my work" programs to help young customers where they got real work experience. A group of students worked with the city of Harrisburg in the Public Works Department where over at City Island they cleaned up the island and there was another group of students at the Camp Hill Borough doing similar things needed. All these students were transition age from high school. Young people with disabilities are more disadvantaged than their nondisabled peers with regard to getting work experience and jobs and how to interact with management, etc.

BVRS also ran the Early Reach Academy geared for young people preparing to go to college. That occurred virtually this summer. A variety of modules were taught by Early Reach staff related to advocacy, how to talk to their professors, accessibility, disability awareness, when to disclose disability to an employer or a school. Mock interviews and resume prep were also part of these learning modules.

BVRS is now gearing up to take part in National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October every year. Mock interviews will occur and also a job fair right in the office. Also doing something at the Capitol with Unique Source and a group experience with the transition people on 10/27/2022 and giving out awards to employers locally who have worked with our customers. This involves giving them a plaque, taking pictures, and writing an upbeat article depicting all the things the employer did right. That will be on Facebook undoubtedly.

Staffing. One new staff member, Angie Zalomey was hired a month ago. She will be working for BVRS, having an adult caseload in Mechanicsburg, PA. Last summer we met Cassandra Enck, who was a new hire and now is no longer on probation and is working with customers in the Hershey and Hummelstown area.

BBVS report: Natalie Barbush. Unlike BVRS, BBVS has several programs. BVRS has 279 VR customers. The closure goal is 52 with one successful closure so far. There are 197 customers in the Independent Living Older Blind program. Two new social workers have just started working so the goal for each social worker is still being determined. Those new workers always have a prorated goal the first year of employment which is fair. By the second year the new workers have had some experience and can better estimate next steps so they can get their paperwork done more efficiently by then. The goal is currently 79 but that goal will change when the third Social Worker gets the rest of her caseload and has a goal assigned to her. Goals generally are 45 per social worker for all programs. Last quarter the two new social workers were at our meeting.

Specialized Services-Children have 213 customers. Specialized Services-Adult has 15 customers. Successful closures so far are 9 closures. Not sure if this is for all programs though says CAC secretary.

Orientation and. Mobility has 45 customers. The goal is 102 with 25 successful closures so far.

Vision Rehabilitation Therapy program has 74 customers, and the goal is 78 for the year. There are 7 successful closures so far.

Staffing update. Vacancies in District Administrator, Clerical assistant 3, (CA3) clerical assistant 2 (CA2) VR Counselor, local office fiscal assistant, and a vision Rehab supervisor. Interviews were conducted for the fiscal assistant and the CA2 and the process is moving along. The VRC position has been posted and as of yesterday, the District Administrator position is posted again.

The Strive On program has started. There was a Spring course and that dealt with employability readiness, and now the Fall course is focusing on post-secondary readiness. The Fall and Spring sessions complement each other. Students can and are encouraged to participate in more than one session. The Fall session began 09/01/2022 and runs until 11/17/2022. Fall topics will focus on assistive technology, personal management, independence, and readiness for goal achievement after high school. Three Harrisburg District BBVS customers are participating and possibly a fourth student will be participating.

Priorities include outreach, referrals and hiring, Nan participated in the National Night Out. That was held after a two-year hiatus at Fairview Township, and other townships. It was at the Roof Parka beside the Township building. Typically have 3,000-4,000 attendees. Nan has established a good relationship with the Fairview Township through the course of her work. The National Night Out is an annual community building campaign that promotes police/community relationships and neighborhood camaraderie. Nan did report an incredible turn-out, and many people came to our booth.

One Social Worker and one VRT participated in the Willow Valley Community Health and Fitness expo, 2022. Taken from their invitation: this event celebrates the vitality of older adults, while encouraging them to engage in activities to maintain or improve their health. It is also an opportunity for local health and wellness professionals to share educational information and their expertise with the residents. This year they expected more than 800 residents of Willow Valley and also invited the general public.

We have been exploring other community resources to reach out to and we are trying to be creative and expand to other areas.

Natalie had one success story to share but did not do it because Nan shared already. The success story was about someone who received O&M. Nan's presentation covered all that this success story would have.

John Horst had Pat Kane read a write-up which is about the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind up-coming Conference and Convention October 27--30, 2022. It is virtual on Zoom and through ACB Media. Note: ACB means American Council of the Blind.

Other Business. We'd like to have elections in December. We are electing the CAC Chair, CAC Vice-Chair, and the CAC Secretary.

Next meeting: December 20, 2022 at 555 Walnut Street, 8th floor conference room for BBVRS and BBVS. A Skype phone number will also be provided for people to join remotely.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Cathy Long, Secretary