

**Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Monday, April 25, 2022**  
**MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

Suzanne Erb (CAC Chairperson), Shari Brightful (DA/BVRS), Kathy Fogel (ADA/BVRS), Alexander Shay (Acting DA/BBVS), Lynn Heitz (ASB), Andrew Pennington, Melissa Good (CIS), Julia/Auto, Joan Nelson, June Waters-bey, Steve Whittaker

**Welcome:**

Suzanne Erb/CAC Chairperson opened the meeting 10:00 A.M. and conducted a complete roll call of attendees for this meeting.

Chair then continued the first order of business which was a welcome and thank you all for your attendance.

This is her first time chairing this meeting from her new office and role at CareerLinks which she will provide all with an update with some of the things that are happening at CareerLinks having to do with people with disabilities later in this meeting.

Welcome and first line of business was minutes from last meeting acceptance with any/all necessary corrections was put on the floor for vote. There was none thus Lynn made motion for acceptance and it was 2<sup>nd</sup> by Andrew, thus it was carried and accepted by all in attendance.

**Kathy Fogel/BVRS Philadelphia Report**

Staff currently on a hybrid schedule. We are in the office (3) days and telework (2) days. We are planning on going to in-person staff meetings, starting in July.

**Staffing Update:** A new counselor started today, Zarifa Roberson/VRC. We are excited that we have one new VRC and that a posting came down for three VRCs that Steve, Shari, myself and another supervisor are preparing to do interviews for now. We are very excited about this.

Shari has put in recommendations for every level, class and every position here in our office, because we have openings.

LaKeysha McLaurin who left a year and so many months ago, in January, we just completed interviews for the Manager 1/ADA slot, and hopefully that will be announced soon.

We have two retirements approaching myself and Tajamah Pippen, our Clerical Supervisor, both of us are leaving in June.

**Goals Update:** April 4<sup>th</sup> we were at 188 individuals that our office was able to assist with obtaining employment. So, as of April we were at 42%. We are behind, given since it's April we would be around 75%, but we still helped at least 188 customers as of a month ago.

**Compliance Cases:** Our compliance for moving cases to 02s and 10s are a little behind, but we encourage our staff to move our cases in a timely manner.

**Fiscal:** We are coming to our EOFY which is June 30, 2022, and we will be getting a new EOFY July 1, 2022, so management is really working hard with the supervisors and counselors to purge, cancel balances and to get invoices in, because there is a lot of money, what we call, on the street and we need to get those invoices in, so we are somewhat balanced.

Andrew Pennington chimed in to ask a question regarding the virtual hybrid. He has heard through other CACs that a lot of the DOs are open to the public. Has Philadelphia made themselves open to the public again?

Kathy responded to Mr. Pennington with "YES", April 4, 2022, we reopened to the public. The first week we had about (8) customers come in and the second week, we had about 10, thus gradually our customers are coming in for either individual meetings with our counselors or dropping off paperwork that they have signed. We are continuing to track the amount of customers coming into our office now.

It was a little iffy with the mask and now not a mask, but I think it's pretty clear. The building had a mask policy, then they took it down, because of Mayor Kenny.

Customers are somewhat comfortable, right now, meeting with us virtually. That has been successful, but it will help those that do not have that access to the internet and the slowness of the paperwork coming through the mail, if they do wish to come in. It will make it easier for them to now come in.

We were a little worried about a possible flooding of customers, but we are no longer worried.

Andrew Pennington then chimed back in to say, so you have 188 26s, how many customers are involved in getting services in Philadelphia?

Kathy responded that she didn't know the total number, but she knows for referrals it's around 1,000.

Andrew then asked, is it possible that you can still hit the goal within the FFY?

Kathy replied with she feels that is not possible.

Kathy went on to say that Pittsburgh DO is right around the same % as us at present. Other offices are closer to reaching their goal.

Andrew then asked, budget wise, is there a potential that DOs may be pushing monies back to Central Office to potentially remit? Last year they had sent back 20 million and carried over 60 million, so I am just trying to get a broad perspective.

Kathy responded with every time we do a purge, every month, we meet with the supervisors to go over the list of the open POs and the supervisors meet with their counselors one on one. If there are outstanding invoices that have maybe 3 units left and CIS is finished working with the customer, either CIS can cancel the balance or they let us know, so we can notify our fiscal cancel the money, so that we don't have that money obligated and sitting there, so that someone else can use it.

However, there is a lot on the street which concerns us, so what we do for phases 3, 4 and 5 in supportive employment, we try to do all (3) phases at once, so that the customer or provider is not waiting for that service authorization to come through and we encounter that "POP" violation and that's been helpful.

We are also low in staff. Our goal is 450 customers to provided closure to competitive employment and when you don't have the staff, it's very difficult. Right now, we have 22 counselors, (3) are transition, (2) are ODP and I think maybe (11) are just for adults and then we just had (2) resign that left Friday and a month ago, thus we have a lot of reasons preventing us from reaching our goal, as I stated earlier.

**Office Re-Opening:** We now have an armed guard in our office who started with us on the 4<sup>th</sup> for the re-opening, as well. He is with us from 7:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.

We have (2) State Priorities right now for the whole state, Outreach & Referral Priority, along with Staffing. Jill Rosenblum/Supervisor Annuitant for our office has done a great job of doing research for our zip code regions with high numbers. We looked at everyone's caseloads and anyone who had (10) or more referrals into that zip code, we identify the disability, and the referral source and pre-app application doesn't really capture as much, you must really dig in it and checkoff "Other" and there are a lot of others So, when you dig into it, you do see that there's some support for some agencies like The Office for Long-term Living, a lot of mental health, some physical restoration like Moss and Magee and a lot of ODP referrals. We broke it down into (5) headings and Jill has made contact with at least 40 agencies and has started doing OVR one-one presentations, as such we hope to see the referral increase, but again we need the staff to handle the referrals as they come in, so there are competing priorities.

Recently, with the new changes, Marci Katona is now the new Bureau Director for BVRS. Guidance given was to take a look at the lower regions/zip codes. I am on the outreach team for a little bit and then we have Jill and (4) other staff members on the outreach team now looking at the caseloads of our counselors who haven't gotten referrals in certain zip codes/regions, and we will start to investigate agencies in those areas. Stay tuned.

Andrew Pennington then asked, has there been any thought given to potentially utilizing the people who are successful closures as a referral point? I know that there may not be many, you

would need permission and it's much more indebt then just asking them, but it seems like the 188, I mean I can't assume its all in the same zip code which Kathy responded correct.

The cool thing about this outreach thing is that it is not a permission thing, we can do our outreach based on our office plan. Kathy stated she will bring this up to Shari and the outreach team.

Andrew again commented that you can use the business as resource, especially if they are happy with the individual who is placed with them. I know that goes a little bit above and beyond, but I am just spit balling here to try and help.

Kathy responded she will share with the outreach team. We meet at 1 p.m. today.

Lynn asked to have you had any difficulties getting additional monies from Central Office for the needs of your customers in the district?

Kathy responded "NO", not at all. We have a resource account and then Linda sends it up to a woman named Lisa Pletz whom I think has been taking that over. I know they have been hiring a few people and brought back quite a few annuitants, as well as working on placement in roles, but there has never been a delay, when requesting funds.

Andrew asked is everyone here familiar with the current administration change in Central Office.

Lynn responded with probably not!

Andrew followed up with I think that it would be beneficial.

Kathy chimed in stating that she is not sure she knows it all, but I will look for the email.

Alex chimed in that he would cover this in his BBVS report.

Suzanne stated having to do with various zip codes, I am wondering about the outreach to people who speak different languages and English is not their native language, for example some of the zip codes where there a lot of Hispanic speakers or a lot of people who speak either Chinese, Vietnamese or other languages?

Kathy responded with most of the outreach in the zip codes, when Jill drilled down, it was mental health centers with some Spanish, Asian & Chinese, but we do have, when Shannon was here, I believe in September, Shari went with Shannon and we assigned a counselor to SEAMAAC. The concern is that we sent out an email, our point of contact to supportive employment providers, asking if the providers had the capability to handle 15 languages and the short answer is "NO". So even in our own community we have difficulty. We may have a language line to do at least the interview, but the challenge is to have job coaches go out and find jobs and then train, shadow, or help people learn their jobs because of the limited access to the language interpreters.

Andrew stated he thinks that that is excellent innovation and expansion grant for individuals who speak other languages or of different ethnicities who would want to start up a job coaching facility or something, because I agree with Sue, Philadelphia is one of the most diverse cities, so it may be something worth looking into.

Sue then chimed in to say she is wondering about using the various CareerLinks throughout the city if it might not help to maybe have a workshop on outreach or do outreach in all of the CareerLinks. I am wondering about the other CareerLinks usage of OVR. I was at the actually at the CareerLink North and that is a very Spanish populated source, thus that might an interesting resource for OVR to use, if you do not already.

Kathy responded with when Shari toured SEAMAAC and she met with Julia Wagner from the Wellness Center. There is where they discovered that the top 6 languages in Philadelphia include Indonesian, Burmese, Chinese, Mandarin, Chin, Arabic and Spanish, in that order, and they support immigrant and refugee families that come to America.

Suzanne was wondering about their cultural ideas about people with disabilities and whether or not they.... well we basically assume that people with disabilities can work or at least we do, maybe not everybody and I know that that's not always true for some cultures, so I understand that their would be as much of a cultural learning thing than anything else. I understand that this is a big issue, but I agree with Andrew in that it could be a very interesting outreach initiative for an agency to get funding to do.

### **Alexander Shay/BBVS Philadelphia Report**

**Central Office Update:** As of March 18, 2022, pretty much the previous Executive Team was relieved of their roles and that was the Executive Director, Shannon Austin, Deputy Executive Director, Jeremiah Underhill, the BBVS Director, Rod Alcidonis, the Acting BVRS Director, John Miller and Ralph Roach/Central Office Bureau Director, and Ryan Hyde is now the Acting Executive Director and as far as BBVS Bureau Director, Dawn Sokol who was the Erie BBVS District Administrator is now serving in her new role, the Pittsburgh DA, Marci Katona is now serving as the BVRS Bureau Director. I believe she is now Shari's boss. Central Office, I know Tracie Maille who was either a manager or Bureau Director, but she has been serving in that capacity and Kathy I think that's it. I do know that they did bring back several annuitants. I know for BBVS Stan Swaintek is back as an annuitant to support Dawn, as a Field/Regional Director, in her efforts to manage the BBVS offices.

So, it is quite a change and a surprise when we received the email, but again I can't speculate as to why the previous team was relieved of their duties, but this is the current administration.

I do know that and mentioned on our individual management calls that the Secretary Jennifer Berrier, there is just an emphasis on increasing our staffing and referrals statewide, and that's where Kathy was talking about the outreach plan, so some of the outreach plans that we had to submit last week, is just a plan to see if it is viable in some ideas that we have with BBVS.

**Outreach Initiative:** We were thinking of a BBVS seminar, Things that we can just throw together, because Ryan Hyde was just asking that we do what we can with the staff we have which makes sense, because here at 801 Market Street, we have access to a large conference room, The Betsy Ross Conference Room, thus we were thinking of having an event in there kind of focusing on our different disciplines like counselors, social workers, vision rehab therapy and orientation mobility, to invite the public we can utilize social media which we are not doing directly, but Central Office has access to those accounts, such as I believe Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, to trying to get the word out there. We also considering since our building is over the Fashion District, so we are thinking of having a table down there. I learned that there is a Wills Eye Optical Center down there that I need to take a look at, as well as we also want to try and get an update on outreach materials, that we can give away to the public. This has been a challenge over the years. I mean you go to outreach stuff and events and people like to get stuff like snacks, give aways, you know people just like to get something, thus its nice to have something at your table, such as we have 2020 pens that are sort of like a Sharpie that doesn't bleed through. I previously we had the OVR annual report which was neat. It was like a calendar and Dave DeNotaris came up with and put forth which was a great idea, because it had QR codes that you could kind of scan and see a success story every month. Now obviously, Central Office would have to put this together, but these are just ideas. Signature Guides, Magnets, Bump Dots, just kind of like outreach materials and giveaways.

**BBVS Staffing:** We did complete interviews and made a job offer for a Social Worker which we are happy about and she is expected to start May 23, 2022. This is fantastic, because our other Social Worker that we hired back in August, just came off probation, thus now with our Social Worker Unit we have (2) Social Workers and just for posterity/comparison, we used to have (4). We did put in other position requests, but Social Worker is most in demand. Its just the Independent Living Of The Blind Program has been flat funded for many years and is just a growing portion of our needs at BBVS. Certainly, VR is very critical, but the seniors over 55 are a good component, and I do know that this a program that Central Office needs to look at which I do know they are looking at putting together a workgroup to revisit how the future will be.

We did have a Business Services Representative position that went up and came down and we are waiting on candidates for that, because that position would help, well they wouldn't have a caseload, but similar to Kathy's and Shari's team, they would help the counselors with identifying job leads and preparing candidates with applications and job interviews, all those critical skills to help clients that are ready for employment to find that job and secure it successfully. This was something that Rod Alcidonis was spearheading, before he left and at least in Philadelphia, we had a position that was posted with HR, so we will see where that leaves us.

I know we had one years ago and I feel it's a very valuable position and that every office should have one and I know its being considered and they are weighing the needs for this, but its just very important. The counselor has a lot of administrative task added that they have to do, since WIOA, the pre-apps, we have the Credential Attainment/Measurable Skill Gains requirement which I will talk about in a second. It's just challenging for them, they are focused on getting the services and trying to work with the customer with counseling and guidance, but what about that last piece that they can use a little extra help in identifying some of these job leads. I know that

Central Office sends some items, I know Kathy's folks, Tasha, sends us leads, but I think it would be great if we had one specifically for BBVS.

**Closures:** Like Kathy, we are low on VRC closures. I do not know the exact percentage but we are as of April 1, 2022 our counselor closures are 23 out of a goal of 105 which is pretty high, but that's just how the calculation went. Central Office did it based on counselors being there over 2yrs. I think there were some turnovers and if a counselor is there for 2 yrs., their goals go up, cause its seen as a counselor is experienced at 2yrs to have a full quota.

Social Worker is doing great, they have a goal of 45 and they have already exceeded that with 50.

The Vision Rehab Therapist has a goal of 72 and are at 39 at present.

The Orientation and Mobility instructors have a goal of 72 and are at 37 at present, thus not sure if goals will be met, but I just want to say that Instructors for BBVS are dependent on referrals from the counselors and Social Workers which we are working with one which is quite challenging if you must have enough referrals. We will see how all this shakes out by the end of our performance year June 30, 2022.

**Credential Attainment and Measurable Skill Gains:** This is something that all OVR offices need to do to satisfy RSA requirements, our staff have been trained and I think that Central Office did a great job in putting out emails and PowerPoint and different presentations. The idea is to properly document in the CWDS system the credentials and skills that the customers are pursuing. Just to document appropriately to ensure successful reporting. Again its an extra administrative hurdle, I don't know its just a certain ways of handling that, but Central Office has been very supportive in helping us, thus I can't complain, but it is certainly things that counselors have to do. This is probably just a way to improve our report.

**Pre-ETS:** CIS we thank you with the efforts of Joe Thomas who is our counselor and liaison for Overbrook School for the Blind and with his efforts with Overbrook and CIS, I think there is an estimated (10) work experiences that will be commencing which I am very happy about, because I know it has been a challenge to spend Pre-ETS on an individual level, because our students at Overbrook are in one space as a captive audience, thus we have that benefit. Of course, there's the summer programs, but just individual POs like that have been a little bit of a challenge for BBVS so I am happy that of the work that the three individuals were doing to make that happen

There're also opportunities to spend based on the planned status and if a client is interested in Pre-ETS which allows us to spend on eligible equipment and services. This is seen as helping an individual to pursue employment if they are the appropriate age 14 to 21.

**Fall Strive On Program:** A BBVS specific thing which is a virtual event that will be occurring September 1, 2022 through November 17, 2022.

Summer Academy: I know the big question here is will this be coming back? I know its been on hold, due to the reworking and the pandemic. It was a very popular program with BBVS. I know the counselors love it and certainly the customers did. Central Office seems to be on board

with the return, but its too late for 2022, because it involves a lot of planning that needs to be done and there's just not enough time to bring this to pass this year. They start taking Summer Academy applications in January which we are way passed that. There is definitely talks and consideration of doing some kind of in-person programing, whatever that looks like, next year in 2023 which is a great experience.

This is critical too because blind kids are so despaired and they may not know of another blind person in your school district or even your town and Summer Academy really allows the opportunity for students to come together and socialize, share stories, and connect.

Lynn chimed in to say that she thinks it great, the work that is being done for the Overbrook School for the Blind, and getting those individuals into employment opportunities, however, as you and I both know when you apply to go to college there's always that little thing on the application asking what do you do outside of school, and have you ever had a part-time job. I am really concerned about those bright young individuals who are in public or private high schools who are eligible for Pre-ETS programing, and they are not getting it. I can count like (5) high school students, right off the bat, that might not necessary be in your catchment, but across PA who are in a mainstream high school and don't even know what Pre-ETS is, because their counselor hasn't told them or the BBVS DO doesn't do it or whatever the case may be. I mean it is just as important for these students to have an after-school job as it is for students at the Overbrook School for the Blind, because quite frankly, I have been around Overbrook for a long, long time, Suzanne has been around Overbrook for a long, long time and we know that Overbrook has sort of moved to the school for the multiply impaired, the multiply disabled. It's not just blind kids anymore. So, I am really concerned about what's going to be happening with these other students that aren't getting the Pre-ETS programing that they should be receiving. I get the fact that they are all over, but you know when I was there, I suggested to Stan Swaintek about maybe arranging a virtual type thing and getting these students in a virtual room together and doing Pre-ETS kind of stuff which he responded "NO" we are not going to do that. Well if you have blind students in (5) different high schools that could really benefit from this stuff, why not?

And next question for me is what's happening with the Specialized Children and Adult Services programs?

Alex responded with the Specialized Children and Adult Services programs are still there and being funded per year, per case and haven't heard any changes and I don't think that's a problem. I think with the new Social Worker, I am just trying to see what we do and what the school district does. I know there is certainly intervention. I am very happy that the program exists as you do, to help catch kids in the cracks. I know we have had trainings on the federal quota which just for anyone not aware, its just an extra pot of funding for legally blind children which I have had to learn a lot about where the school district is usually responsible and pretty much has already have a lot of the kids signed up, but we are there as BBVS to get the kids that fall between the cracks and for whatever reason might be some transition, staffing and we are tasked in signing those kids up.



As far as your other concern, I think the virtual program, it sounds like Strive On, which we have done as far as trying to link up kids throughout the state or Commonwealth to participate virtually. I do not know the plans if this is going to continue or if they will have the Strive On, but they will also have this Summer Academy thing, but I think that the focus is a little different. Strive On seems to be geared towards self-motivated people who really don't have issues with technology, because they have to be able to, as blind kids, have the JAWS, have the zoom text to be able to login successfully and are really just top-notch students who are ready to go. I believe it was a couple hours every Thursday, I think for several weeks, where the Summer Academy was a much more demanding experience naturally, because its in-person.

As far as the Pre-ETS, I can tell you that LaQuenta Montanez, whom you all know, she is the title not sure, but I believe she is the Transition Coordinator. She has reached out to us on a particular blind student to follow-up with and we did. She is very aware of BBVS.

I don't know how many mainstream blind kids there are and then there is also the additional issue, do they even need our help apart from the school district, but obviously we are supposed to be involved. This is just sort of a nebulous thing. I think that LaQuenta is just really understaffed. I did have that possible idea on my outreach, but we were just trying to focus on what we can do with our capacity.

Lynn then said that when she was here they, the School District of Philadelphia, did not have someone who was employed in the Low Incidents Disabilities position and I actually know that they have someone now. So they have someone, other than LaQuenta who's only job is to work with low incidents like blind kids. I can tell you that there is like over 250 blind kids registered within the School District of Philadelphia. I have had conversations outside with this individual. She is great. You may want to get LaQuenta to give you her contact, because she would be the one who knows where the blind kids are. I don't know that LaQuenta is the perfect match for BBVS, she is more suitable for all the other disabilities rather than blindness.

Andrew asked what are the school's roles in this? IDEA obviously leads up to Pre-ETS. Are we to assume that the Philadelphia School District is not informing blind students of transition services as well?

Lynn stated that she would think that this is true. She really feels they don't know what to do with these kids. They don't have but so many TVIs.

Alex chimed in to say, hold on, let's be fair to the school district. I think the start is to find out what is exactly going on.

Alex made a note to reach out to LaQuenta to obtain the contact of this person Lynn is referring to.

Alex put out there the question of what's being discussed at IEP meetings. Are they aware of BBVS, because I know for a fact that Kathy's ER team that is their job, thus I am sure there is some mention of BBVS, but what are the parents doing? It's not just the school district, but

there are a lot of players involved here. Maybe there could be a better way to streamline referrals to us.

Andrew asked has the transition tool kit been made accessible for blind students. So, when I was at the last PA Rehab Counsel Meeting, they were talking about this tool kit that would provide continuity to the student and parent in regards to transition services whether its Pre-ETS or transition from school to work. I am just curious is this something that is actively being handed out and was it made?

Lynn chimed in to say she is not sure that the PRC has approved this yet. It was part of OVR, but I think the PRC had to put its stamp on it and as of present, I haven't seen any emails coming through with respect to this.

Lynn went on to say that the BBVS district office can open a VR case for a student who is 14. They do not have to wait till the student is 16.

Lynn went on to say graduating from high school is way too late to start transition for blind kids no matter where you are which all agreed. Those kids should be starting their transition services at age 14, and I think that the confusion is that OVR the general disability agency and BBVS has always been the stepchild and will always be the stepchild if it is where it is.

Andrew asked has there been any discussion with the Philadelphia office for Youth Ambassador positions? Do you have any providers lined up and is BBVS actively involved in the potential for these positions?

Kathy responded that Shari, Sharon Silverman/Supervisor, and herself have met with LaQuenta and sent her the provider agreement. Reviewed it and it's sitting somewhere with the school district. I am not sure if there is going to be one this year, because there hasn't been movement on it from the school districts end.

Alex then responded with nothing from BBVS.

Kathy stated that in regard to her work initiative, we have two providers CIS and YAP that have identified locations for our students and we are working on developing more with CIS, paid work experience with a community church, I think for some day care, thus there may be some clearances that need to happen and trainings, so we are working on ways those can get waves and trying to identify students that have that interest and then with YAP, they have identified a few places like Philly Pump Track and another where students can do some paid work experiences. So we are doing that for over the summer from like June to August. However, the Youth Ambassador provider agreement hasn't been signed yet. I am not saying it won't be, just hasn't been signed as of yet.

Andrew stated that he would encourage BBVS to be involved in informing youth about the Youth Ambassador positions mainly because I have heard of various BBVS offices that were becoming informed, but not as informed as BVRS offices were, and because BBVS serves broader regions then DO offices there has been an inability to understand what, I mean you

obviously would have to go back to your county in many circumstances, unless the position is virtual with regards to intermediate units or any advocacy platforms that decide to sign on for the provider agreement. I just recommend reaching out to the youth and students that BBVS serves with at least the opportunity to interview for these positions when they become available.

Lynn responded with I kind of think that those referrals are going to or opportunities are going to come more through the intermediate units in the counties rather than through Philadelphia. We do know one intermediate unit that has reached out to a blind student, but the BBVS DO didn't know anything about it and it wasn't Philadelphia.

This is Andrew's concern for equal opportunities offered.

Due to a potential conflict, Suzanne suggested a poll be taken to determine the next CAC meeting in the month of July 2022. Alex Shay agreed to send out the poll to the CAC members and determine the best dates and times for everyone.