

CAC MINUTES
Friday, July 8, 2022
10:00 a.m. Conference Call

In Attendance: Bob Mecca, LIFT; Diana Kreydt, PSU DuBois; Andrew Pennington, CAP; Kelly King, The PEAL Center; Jim Whitonis, OVR; Chris Palmer, OVR.

Welcome & Introductions: Bob Mecca opened the meeting. There were no questions or changes to April 2022 meeting notes.

Regular attendees introduced themselves to Jim Whitonis. Jim is new to OVR – he previously worked at White Haven for 20+ years. He is currently at Central Office as a VR Specialist in Planning and Training. He will primarily work on state planning but will be the liaison between the CACs and PA Rehab Council.

Chris Palmer explained that the link on the agenda shows where our CAC minutes go. The minutes go to Central Office (Jim Whitonis), and they are then posted to the Rehab Council website. You can see what other CACs are doing as well as look back at our previous minutes if you need to refer to them. Currently only one of the CACs has bylaws; although, they can be set up. The 2017 handbook is available on the website as well. A copy will be sent out with the minutes.

Andrew Pennington of CAP asked Jim if he has had the opportunity to view the PA Rehab Council site and noted that there is incorrect information out there – some of the CACs haven't been updated since 2018. Jim is aware, and they are working on updating. Meeting during Covid was an issue for some of them. Chris added that for our CAC, it was a conscious decision for us during Covid to continue virtually. We had consistent attendance, but it tended to be lower than prior to Covid. It is easy to see how it could have dissolved if we didn't push through and she appreciates everyone who hung in there with us through the pandemic. Pitt Bradford and the IU generally attend regularly as well. Chris would like to see a little more involvement with current and former customers. If anyone has someone in mind, let her know.

OVR Updates

Chris Palmer updated that our ADA position is in the process of being filled, and we are hopeful to hear news soon. Two VRC postings are up until Monday, July 11th. The Elk/Cameron general plus ODP caseload as well as Clearfield/Jefferson ODP caseload are what we are looking to fill. The ODP caseload has been open since March and Elk/Cameron since December.

My Work Summer Youth Program is in progress. This is the first year for DuBois DO, and it is being done with the Boys and Girls Club in St. Marys. Elcam is the Pre-ETS services provider. It started last Friday and will last for 4 weeks.

OVR is working on outreach and referrals. OVR statewide is taking note of who we need to seek out – untapped entities/resources. We have a group in the DuBois DO who are working on it. We anticipate some updates to our referral process. A few years ago, we went to an online process; our CAC didn't like it. We are now back to primarily staff assisted referrals. More will come out on this.

In July OVR had an all staff training; these will be happening monthly.

HGAC updates were provided at the Executive Director's Meeting. Daily in person tours are happening at the Center. Virtual tours are being worked on. They are restarting the in-person transition fair in the fall. HGAC is available to set up tables at events to talk about what they do. CTI is within HGAC. You do not have to have a disability to enroll in CTI. HGAC also has the Center for Assistive and Rehabilitative Technology (CART) and does vocational evaluations. If you haven't checked out HGAC, you should do so. Bob Mecca stated that he went to HGAC and got an accounting degree there. In 2018 he was invited back as a keynote speaker for their graduating class. He got his three most important things in life there – playing in organized sports, earning his degree and meeting his wife. Sometimes he hears negative comments, but he is a success story. Andrew asked Bob why do you suppose that is; he wonders if there is something that the CAC can do. From Bob's experience, he feels that the people who complain are the ones who have acted out and been disciplined. Bob is more than happy to share his story if someone is interested in going. He feels it gets a bad reputation due to a small portion of the student population. Andrew noted that when he talks to customers, they either come in wanting to go to HGAC or have some pre-conceived ideas about it. Chris advised that HGAC has made great effort in updates to the facility, programs, etc. They do need people who have had good experiences to speak up. Bob added that it would be great for OVR and the CIL to work together on that. He would be happy to speak even to a group of them about the positives. Chris will follow up with Jill at HGAC to see if there are upcoming promotional opportunities.

Andrew Pennington asked Chris if PA Rehab is opening up the order completely. Chris has not heard anything definitive yet. Jim added that it is in progress. They are setting up the two week comment period now. After that, it should get rolling. This has been proposed for a 12 month period. Andrew noted that is incredible news, and that it is wonderful to hear what DuBois and CO are doing to get people started in the process. * He added that across the state, we have seen so many changes with job coaches/providers – a shift like he has never seen. He feels it is exceptional that OVR is working to reach out to providers and the community. Chris stated that being a small office with solid relations, we have been able to keep up with our regular providers; but folks who were regular referral sources - but not necessarily regular providers - is where we are trying to update.

Chris advised that we had recent temporary approval to increase our financial needs (FNT) income allowance to \$100k. Additionally, HGAC services are temporarily exempt from the FNT and there are some changes to the college training formulas (tuition max./EFC/R&B) for the next 12 months. Kelly stated that this is all phenomenal. Chris reiterated that this is only approved for the period noted – 7/1/22 to 6/30/23 at this time. We are putting letters out to students impacted that spells out the temporary changes. We have had families over the years who haven't qualified financially then do not follow through with the other services we have to offer. This may help them out. There is so much more to it than just the financial aid. Kelly asked for the details of what the families are being told and Chris indicated she would share the content of the letter. **

Member Updates

LIFT: Bob Mecca advised that they are having the Expo at the Red Fern on 7/26/22 from 9 am to 1 pm. They are still allowing people to sign up for vendor tables. During the meeting, the application for vendor tables was sent out to the CAC members. If anyone has any questions about the expo, reach out to Bob. Andrew plans to talk to Steve about CAP attending. As of July 7th, they have 30 vendors signed up. They can take 50-55. They are well on their way to a successful event. ***

Bob informed that Hope is no longer with LIFT. She got a director position at Elk County Salvation Army. She was with LIFT for 19 years and will be missed. At this time, her work emails are being forwarded to Bob. After

the expo, they will begin to look to fill the Events Coordinator position. They do not yet have a complete outline of the job duties – it will include fund raising and grant research in addition to a caseload. Chris advised that if they would like help, DuBois' Business Services (John and Kari) can sit down with them and work on that. Bob stated that would be great.

The PEAL Center: Kelly King updated that they have had a lot of changes. They have special education programs going on, youth trainings in various parts of the state in the fall, and family leadership institutes. They are putting together a new advisory committee and working on how to make this system better to make sure services and supports effectively meet the needs of individuals. They are working as well on thoughts of the justice system and how many people intersect with that – trauma, etc. Things are beginning to take shape with new staff.

CAP: Andrew Pennington advised that CAP had a recent meeting with Acting Executive Director Ryan Hyde. Updates will be going out to providers. Some changes will take some time to implement. They are updating the language to make it a lot more descriptive with regards to services. Andrew is currently working with some advocacy cases as well as his current duties in outreach.

PSU DuBois: Diana Kreydt informed that they have a new Chancellor. Their numbers are down a little, but he has all kinds of plans for increasing attendance. Disability Services numbers are down, and kids are saying that they thought their schools would refer them to her, but they need to self-identify. They need to come to her to get their accommodations.

Andrew asked what the Disability Services Center does to circumvent the fact that kids are not self-identifying. Diana noted that they send letters to all new students, she presents at new student orientations, and it is also in their syllabi. Andrew asked if we know who is telling them this? Diana said that students say they are told that in their IEP meetings. Kelly King added being concerned that students think they are being referred and with direct information to them, they are not getting it. She sits on some transition councils, and she can make it known to them – if it is happening here, it is happening statewide. Andrew said he can take this issue back to the PA Rehab Council Transition Meeting. If it is happening, it can be very detrimental to an individual's success at college. Chris informed that our staff have it in the customer's plan to seek out disability services. It gets documented, but you can't make them go. As a VRC, she saw students often want to try to do it on their own and so they do not reach out until they are really struggling.

Other Comments

Jim Whitonis discussed that some of the CACs have talked about social media but have found it difficult to get up and running. Maybe the CILs can put on their page that there is a CAC meeting – it is worth trying to advertise it on the other pages. Chris and Bob will hash out some ideas soon. Kelly added that it would be good if we have items we can share and like on our pages.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held Friday, October 14, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. and will be scheduled in Elk County. Location to be determined. Chris will check on the availability of the Career Link and Bob will check the CEC.

*Notice of the public comment period came out later the same day. See attached.

****Verbiage from Temporary College Policy Funding Increase letter noted below:**

“On June 2, 2022, the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation State Board passed a motion to temporarily increase the maximum funding for post-secondary tuition, effective 07/01/2022 and ending 06/30/2023, unless otherwise extended by recommendation by the OVR Executive Director and approval by the State Board. As a post-secondary student, you are directly impacted by this approval. Effective 07/01/2022, the maximum tuition assistance provided by OVR has increased to \$7,061.00 per semester or \$14,122.00 annually. These numbers represent the maximum award an OVR customer may receive for tuition assistance. The amount of financial assistance you will receive is based on a formula that includes the information provided from your school based on your Free Application for Student Aid Form (FAFSA). The amount of funding you will receive will be indicated on a Purchase Order that both you and your school will receive. These temporary maximums will end 06/30/2023, and the maximum award used in the formula will return to the average SSHE tuition, unless otherwise communicated to you in writing.”

*****EXPO info shared with CAC same day via email from Aimee.**