

**Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting
July 19, 2022
MINUTES**

Attendees:

Suzanne Erb/Networks for Training & Development, Shari Brightful/BVRS, Dave Bautista/BVRS, Alexander Shay/BBVS, Lynn Heitz/NFB of PA, Andrew Pennington/CAP, Raquel Mangual, Charles Horton, Amy Nieves, Sylvia Purnell and Ammarah Kapadia

WELCOME:

Suzanne Erb opened the meeting at 1:10 p.m. and welcomed and thanked all for joining the call, apologized for all technical difficulty, and moved forward with the meeting.

Chair moved on by requesting a motion of acceptance of minutes from last meeting. Andrew Pennington made a motion for acceptance and Alexander Shay 2nd. The motion was put on the floor for vote, but then held up by Lynn Heitz, who asked to hold up before we move forward. She expressed that she is a little concerned about the minutes. She went on to say first your name is incorrect on the minutes and second, they end like very abruptly. She continued with her concern being these minutes reflect this CAC and these (2) district offices and they are placed on the Rehab Counsel's website for people statewide to look at and it's a poor reflection of the district office.

Chair responded with ok, then why don't we wait to accept the minutes, until any/all corrections are made. Chair continued with we can do this by email. She went on to state that this is a good point, Lynn. The minutes really do need to reflect a certain quality and professionalism.

Alex commented by asking Lynn, you said Suzanne's name was spelled wrong and Lynn responded YES! Her name was spelled as Susan and that's not her name her name is Suzanne. Alex stated, I just want to take down notes, so we can take care of that. Lynn then again stated that the way the minutes end, it doesn't even reflect that there was mention of when the next meeting would be. Lynn then went on to say that the minutes were inaccessible with the screen reader. I mean, I don't know visually what they look like, but all I could think of was they were a mess.

Steven Wall stated I am truly confused, because the reason there is no date for the next meeting at the end of the minutes is because there was none. An email was going to be sent out to confirm the next date, thus no date could be included, so I can't reflect anything in the minutes that has not been said on this call.

Lynn stated that the conversation of a decision of the next meeting date could have been noted, but Suzanne did verify that there was no date mentioned and that's not a reflection on anyone taking the minutes.

Chair then thanked Lynn for her comment. Lynn then responded again with I have worked at to many places and read to many memos with spelling mistakes and punctuation mistakes and just plain old mistakes that JAWS picks up and people read over them and they just don't realize you don't whip this out. Fortunately, screen readers picks up all this stuff.

Shari Brightful stated that to be quite clear, we released this information to all regarding what happened, and I am glad you all are on the call. There was an email released that the wrong version was released. Herself and Alex are very happy to continue to read through these which is what we have been doing. We have a team of people who work together to facilitate this meeting and put the notes together, but if you missed that email, we are very sorry, but the wrong version was sent out which reflected DRAFT UPDATE it did not say FINAL, but we will make sure we get this together and make sure that it is accessible with screen reader, as well as that people's names are spelled correctly. We appreciate you bringing this to our attention, but we try our best to make sure these minutes go out before the next meeting, because the meeting is every 3 months and things like this can be clarified before we come to this venue. So, if you all have comments, it really helps if you all read the minutes and get back to us before we have the next meeting, since meetings are every 3 months.

Chair thanked Shari for her statement and informed her if she has to leave early, do not hesitate. If you have an emergency. We all understand.

Chair then moved forward to say, can we amend the motion to say that the minutes will be accepted as corrected? This was motioned by an attendee and 2nd by Alex. Minutes were accepted.

Chair then went on to introduce Amy Nieves the presenter for today's meeting.

PRESENTATION(Amy Nieves)

Started with she is very happy to be with everyone today.

Presentation was sent out prior to all, but just in case you didn't receive, it will be resent with minutes today.

I am Amy Nieves, I use "SHE" for pronoun, and I am the Executive Director for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.

I am a fair skin female with blond hair, green glasses, and a blue top with green and white cherries on it, as well as I identify as a person with a disability.

Ms. Nieves stated that what she is going to share today is a little bit about what our office does, what we are working on currently and also, she wanted to celebrate the ADA turning 32 this month for Disability Pride Month.

(PRESENTATION ATTACHED)

Chair chimed in after presentation with the question could you please ask the people/panelist in all of whom will be presenting like maps and things to be sure to make sure that they explain things in a non-visual way, so that blind individuals listening in can get as much accessible information as possible, because sometimes what very often will happen is that they'll assume that everyone can see the map. They need to be informed ahead of time, so that they can put it in their planning and even if we let them know 48 hours in advance that's not going to be enough time.

Amy responded she understands, and this goes to the learning and unlearning points for all of us. So, Suzanne regarding that, when I reached out to those panelists that are planning, they did receive that feedback already. I do try to do that whenever we host folks. We want their slides ahead of time, so I can see them and help them with accessibility and provide resources and we talk about the visual descriptions and why that's critical for those slides. So, we do try and prioritize this ahead of time whenever we host an outside participant.

Chair thanked her for this and for her presentation.

Chair then went off the agenda to ask Charles Horton to pass along the link for the survey and just speak on the survey for Cities of Inclusion (COI) for a minute?

Mr. Horton went on to say for Cities of Inclusion there's a survey going out and the overall objective of COI is to make those LCF one of the most inclusive cities in America. There were a bunch of cities that had COI, but Philadelphia is the only one that still maintained it. The survey is to give an overview of what needs to be done and what can be done. What I will do is forward the link to Suzanne to send out to everyone and it is a fully accessible link. Suzanne worked very hard on this link to make sure that it is inclusive for all. Kudos to Suzanne and therefore I fought so hard to make sure that Suzanne was a part of COI so that we can make sure that all voices and disabilities have a place at the table, so that when we are trying to make things fully inclusive, everyone must be involved. Each person who has the link can give out 150 \$15.00 gift cards. So if you use your link you are able to give out these gift cards.

BVRS REPORT (Dave Bautista/ADA, BVRS Philadelphia)

Dave introduced himself and that he will provide the update for BVRS.

Staffing Updates:

Regarding staffing, we had completed another round of VRC interviews last month and conditional offer was made. We are still waiting on the final offer.

We still have several VRC vacancies and have requested that these continue to be posted.

Posting for VRC Supervisor came down last week and we will be working to schedule interviews.

Clerical Assistant 3 posting, there is a list of applicants that we are waiting to be sent to us and we will then move forward with scheduling interviews.

Budget:

Staff continues to connect with providers to request invoices and reports. Supervisors have been in contact with providers, vendors and providing them with one-on-one training on how to complete our reports and billing. This is a slow process that we hope will help with EOY fiscal procedures.

Goals:

Our office was not able to place 450 persons with integrated competitive employment. We were able to place 246 customers this program year. Shari will be meeting with her supervisor to discuss what is working and where we may need to improve.

Staff works very hard to reach individual goals and should be recognized for his/her efforts.

Pre-Apps Update:

We are currently running “My Works” program at Philly on Pump Track, Counsel Member Kendra Brooks office and Chosen 300. We have 8 participants for this summer opportunity. Students appear to be having a great time and we plan on visiting the sites. Several students are also engaged in Paid Work Experiences with Journey to Lotus. We hope to be able to share photos and writeups on OVR’s Facebook page. We are working on securing the photo releases.

Early Reach Coordinators are working with (4) high schools to provide group services during ESY (Extended School Year).

DHOH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) Academy at my last check-in, we had (2) students from PA School for the Deaf attending the academy. The academy began on Sunday and will run for (2) weeks.

HGAC is collaborating with Philadelphia School District on getting students to HGAC for an in-person tour and setting up a virtual hour in the near future, as well as inviting HGAC to Philadelphia for any future events.

The goal is to outreach to more people in Philadelphia, in hopes that they will attend HGAC’s programs. HGAC is a great option that many are unaware exists.

State Summer Intern Update:

We are happy to be working with summer interns. We have Ammarah who is on the call today joining us who is a summer intern for Norristown District Office that we are helping to supervise. She has been contacting various Philadelphia vendors and providers and updating information. She has also served staff in conducting intake calls and completing the pre-application. She is learning transferrable skills that she can continue to use in school and

employment. She has also developed a PowerPoint for youth and adults on how to open a checking account.

Our other intern, Bill, is a full-time summer intern who is in the office Monday-Wednesday and he teleworks on Thursdays and Fridays. He has been working with Tasha Carter our BSR to create LinkedIn profile teaching him how to network with employers and talk about OVR and customers we work with to help them obtain employment. He is also working with Nea Hargrove our Early Reach Coordinator. He has been going out to schools where he has done groups services for ESY.

Bill is working on his own career exploration PowerPoint to present to the ESY students talking about his high school experience and navigating college with his disability and choosing a major of Sports Administration.

This concludes updates for BVRS. Any questions?

There were none.

Chair came back in to thank Dave Bautista for the BVRS report.

BBVS REPORT (Alexander Shay/Acting DA, BBVS Philadelphia)

Staffing:

Regarding the DA position, I, applied for the position and I was recently given a conditional offer of employment for the position pending background check. I am personally very happy about this. An email with this announcement will not go out to all OVR staff, until everything is checked out.

Just as a reminder, we have been without a full-time District Administrator, since last year in February, when Damon Johnson resigned for another position.

Now I can work at developing a full management team at BBVS as my colleague Dave Bautista just got promoted to ADA with BVRS and I know Shari is working hard as well to have a full management team there, because there has been a lot of turnover. So, managers are necessary to have these offices running well.

Our Social Worker II, Charlene Edwards, I believe I mentioned last time she started at the end of May, so she is (2) months into her role now.

We have (2) Social Workers, and I would like to have (4) and we may get (3). I must put in another request for this, but Charlene is managing Bucks County and sharing Philadelphia County with Ina our other Social Worker who is still relatively new, being that she is less than a year. She started at the end of August.

This is for the independent living blind programs and specialized services. The child programs up to the age of 14, the working age adult who are not able to work and are blind. That's where

Chester and Delaware Counties are not currently covered, so the supervisor Arwa the acting supervisor is doing her best to manage that for us.

We have interviews ongoing now for a BSR which we are pleased if we can onboard. This is much like BVRS, I think you guys have (2). This would really help to target employers, job search, developing job leads, helping ready to employment customers specifically for blind and visually impaired. This would be a great boost.

We are also interviewing for a Clerk Typist 2. We lost one at the end of May who moved on and took a transfer to another agency. So, right now we only have (1) clerical and clerical is a backbone for office operations.

We also had a counselor who resigned in early June, so that position will be posted soon.

Lastly regarding staffing is the VR Supervisor which we are allowed to have (2), one is Giovanna who has been here and the other one's posting just came down. This is something that Central Office, well there's a lot of postings lately which is good throughout the state that I will kind of talk about, there is a twin priority, OVR is just kind of focused on ramping up staff and then also we must ramp up referrals.

Statistics:

I will be reporting the entire performance year from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022.

We fell short. We had a goal of 105 which was high for us but it was just the way the math worked out last year. We had 28 VR closures which is low. The Social Workers exceeded their goal with 48 out of 45. VRTs 60 out of 72 and O&Ms 55 out of 72.

As always goals are just what we need to measure success, but I am proud of my staff no matter what, because we are here serving people. It's tough for BBVS and tough for OVR overall, but we are trying to rebuild and continue our efforts.

We do not know the VR closure yet. We are expecting to hear that soon. That's obviously going to affect the counselors. We did learn at a recent Executive Management Meeting that it is probably going to be higher. We don't know what that is going to look like. The closure goals are the same for the Social Workers and Instructors.

As far as Outreach, as every office in OVR, we have been tasked with increasing OVR referrals. We have locally setup a local office outreach committee to track and monitor this. We have submitted plans to our Executive Director, well it went up the chain, but we did get approval from our Executive Director Ryan Hyde and said we can move forward. The idea is to kind of focus on events that will maximize our staff time and generate the greatest number of referrals. Some of the things we have with the intermediate units which I think we need to hit Philadelphia School District. LaQuenta Montanez is aware of BBVS, but I think it would be a good idea if we reach out to her, and I believe there is another contact in there for her colleague and other transition person which Lynn, thank you for providing to me. This is something we need to follow-up on, as soon as possible. Delaware County and Chester County, St. Christophers

Hospital for Children some of our staff have also made inroads with the company Vanguard, the financial services company. We have a customer there and based on the interactions that could be a great outreach and possibly a business services opportunity. I know we have been asked to look at the Centers for Independent Living including Liberty Resources. We are trying to do (2) BBVS events, but we will see. We only have so much staff and time, but this is on our radar.

The benefit of BBVS is that our Social Workers and instructors are already tasked with doing outreach regularly which has to be tracked and is part of the performance reviews, but this year starting July 1, 2022, our counselors are now asked to join this effort. So, we are open to the CAC for ideas and collaborations.

I want to report that there was recent law, ACT 131, permitting visually impaired drivers the ability to drive with a bioptic telescope lens that took effect in September of last year, so BBVS management team is putting together procedures as to how this is going to look for us.

This will allow visually impaired people to drive, but there is restrictions on what they can do and when and where they can drive. The bioptic lens will have to be worn and a level of training needs to be provided. There's a possibility that we could pay for some of that which will be good. We are not sure how many people applied, but at least we will get that going, thus stay tuned.

Pre-ETS Programing:

The BBVS Strive On Program is a remote experience which has been a fall/spring thing for the last couple of years, and the deadline to apply is quickly approaching, July 26, 2022 for the fall and the program runs Thursdays from 5 -7 pm from September 1, 2022 to November 17, 2022 covering items like Assistive Technology, Personal Management Independent and Post-Secondary Programing. I don't believe the Overbrook School for the Blind's TVI summer program ran this year, but the IDEAL program at CBVI is currently in session, so we have a number of students going there which is good news. We are excited about the plan to have the Summer Academy come back in-person, but what it is going to look like we don't know. Karen Walsh-Emma in Central Office is hard at work trying to put this together, but she let us know that it will not look like it did before. There was concerns with costs, time, staff usage, but I anticipate it being very popular for BBVS customers and it had a great environment where blind and visually impaired kids had an opportunity to come together which might be the first time ever because blind kids are kind of separated without an opportunity to interact as much. This was a big win for the last several years. We haven't had it for 2 or 3 years at this point, so that will be exciting. I think the concerns were the pandemic, but right now we are still in it in my mind. I don't know if you label it a post-pandemic world, its just a struggle that we are all facing.

General:

Finally, we were told statewide that we have a lot of money on the table, approximately \$100 million to spend that is expected to carry over to next federal fiscal year. So, although we have money to spend, it should be spent wisely, smartly and within the rules. However there were

recent OVR state board motions that reflect this including the FNT (Financial Needs Test) increase to \$100,000 which is a lot more generous and a lot more people fall under that.

There were some increases in college spending maximums, and we were expected to send out letters to prospective and current college students.

They looked at other areas including opening the OOS (Order of Selection). These are just ideas to try and expand referrals and just making sure that we are increasing our expenditures.

Chair came back in to ask for any questions for either BBVS or BVRS reports.

Other comments and meeting adjournment:

Mr. Pennington thanked Alex for the announcement for OOS and stated that this coming Thursday there is public comment sessions for all that are interested. As of right now it looks like they are opening any/all disability categories on the OOS effective August 8, 2022.

Alex confirmed date with Mr. Pennington who stated that that is the date he got from printout received which he read stating effective August 8, 2022, OVR is planning to re-open the OOS for Pennsylvanians with significant disabilities or non-significant disabilities which means the order would be completely removed essentially. That would be for the next 12 months and then re-evaluated, due to any type of budget restraints.

Alex brings up a great point. There is a lot of money on the table, so if you know individuals that needs the services that OVR/BBVS provide, refer them to the program, because now is a great time for all to become involved in getting these services.

Lynn Heitz stated that there was a lot of conversation at the OVR board meeting in June, regarding the increase in the fee for service dollars to Supportive Employment and what have you, but is there any conversation about that on the BBVS side, as far as Assistive Technology Installation/Training to increase dollar amounts, Rehab. Teaching, O&M Contracting, I mean those have been at \$50 for like 25 years?

Alex responded with "YES" he did address this at the meeting and the short answer is "YES" they are looking at this, but Central Office wants to make a great decision, because I feel the supply side is important as you do. Ryan and the Executive Team have been very receptive to any/all ideas on how to increase expenditures. I think that some of the low hanging fruit they kind of got quick, due to the state board resolutions and they are not done yet. This is on the table and hopefully we will hear something soon. Inflation is killing everyone.

Lynn stated that it's a drum that she beats all the time, the programs that support BVRS customers are the programs that seem to get the first snatch at something, whereas services that affect blind individuals are the stepchildren, I mean what else is new?

Alex pushed back with informing Lynn that the college resolution from the state board is affecting our students. We have a lot of students that can participate with this.

Lynn said that if you read the Rehab Act as back in 1973, it says that a blind individual is not mandated to contribute financially to their college or their education. So even though they have raised that it is still affecting blind kids.

Chair stated that there are many who are blind who are not younger and who also need a lot of training and assistance. Their needs are certainly great and they really need some kind of computer literacy training, whether it's using a tablet of some kind a phone or something, anything to be able to read and write in some way, shape or form in the 21st century. I think this is paramount and something that we need to work on, because people don't understand I think a lot of times and they talk about using social media for people with disabilities which is all good but think of those that are blind or visually impaired that that kind of stuff leaves them out in the cold. If we don't do a better job, we will continue to pay for it.

Lynn came back in to say social media does not teach a blind student how to write a term paper.

Chair then continued to say that while there are several issues that we could continue the meeting on, in the interest of time for this meeting are there any things that someone really feels has a priority for discussion for this meeting before we end, so that we can end by 3:00 p.m.

Alex responded with saying that he was very curious with what Lynn was saying. If you can find a reference or something as to where blind and visually impaired are exempt or something somewhere in the Rehab Act because I am wondering if the State Board needs to hear that and also, we probably should Suzanne look at our calendars to find the next date for the CAC.

Chair agreed and asked for any objections to checking calendars and securing date for next meeting and ending this meeting.

Anyone have a calendar for October which is a crazy month because it is National Disability Month.

Alex asked do you want to stay on Tuesday or is another day better like Monday better? He went on to say that the week of the 17th to the 24th look good?

Chair asked are there any dates that don't work in October for anyone.

Lynn responded that her policy committee meetings are usually Mondays and her POC meetings are usually Wednesdays, so Tuesdays are better for her.

Tuesday, October 25, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. was penciled in and if anyone calls within the next couple days and can't do this date for the next CAC then we can revisit.

Chair asked for motion to have meeting adjourned which Lynn made and it was seconded by Andrew Pennington and meeting was adjourned.