

DRAFT

CAC Advisory Committee

Minutes

Harrisburg District Office
Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and
Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services
December 20, 2022.

Abbreviations in these minutes:

ACB: American Council of the Blind
BBVS: Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services
BEP: Business Enterprises Program
BVRS: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
CAC: Citizen Advisory Committee
D.A.: District Administrator
ILOB: Independent Living Older Blind Program
LOFA: Local Office Fiscal Assistant
O&M: Orientation and Mobility
NFB: National Federation of the Blind
NDEAM: National Disability Employment Awareness Month
NFB: National Federation of the Blind
PCB: Pennsylvania Council of the Blind
SS-a: Specialized Services-Adults
SS-C: Specialized Services-Children
VR: Vocational Rehabilitation
VRC: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
VROC: Vision Resources of Central Pennsylvania
VRT: Vision Rehabilitation Therapist

In attendance: John Horst, Chair
Patrick Kane, VR Supervisor, BVRS, and CAC Liaison
Cathy Long, CAC secretary, retired BBVS employee
Cynthia Gibbs-Pratt, BBVS customer
Nicole Wade, District Administrator, BBVS
Natalie Barbush, Social-work Supervisor and CAC Liaison
Joseph Romeo, VR customer
Treassa Strawn, VROCP
On the phone: Jim Whitonis, Central Office Specialist for OVR CAC meetings
Joan Myers Goodman.

John introduced our speaker for this meeting, Jessica Glasco, Acting Director, Business Enterprises Program. She spoke about the BEP. This program is under the authority of BBVS and is an employment opportunity opened solely for people who are visually impaired, legally blind, and fully blind. This program came into law when thousands of veterans came back from serving their country after suffering serious visual impairment or total blindness. It is called the Randolph-Sheppard Act and is still in effect today. An accompanying law on the books is the

Little Randolph-Sheppard Act and the Conelly Amendments which allows BEP to set up sites at rest stops, post offices, mainly consisting of dispensing products through vending machines which increases the number of opportunities available to blind and visually impaired individuals. Note: This program was not designed to solely serve veterans. Anyone who is eligible for BBVS services in any state of our nation is eligible for this opportunity. Before COVID-19, most Commonwealth office buildings had at least one site managed by a BEP vendor.

Jessica indicated there have been a lot of staff changes recently. For a few years there were several vacancies in the BEP. There was only one BEP agent, one BEP Coordinator, and no Director for the entire Commonwealth. In August, 2022 Jessica became Acting Director of BEP. BEP now has three agents, which puts them at four agents. This is good, considering the number of BEP vendors authorized to be in business. These numbers are low, but the agent to vendor ratio is good. Currently there are 20 BEP vendors and one trainee, who now thankfully also has a location. Currently all locations are vending machine only. Some locations had a snack bar or a ~~caffeteria~~ cafeteria prior to COVID. Since COVID no vendors are managing snack bars or ~~caffeterias~~ cafeterias. Even though Commonwealth and federal employees are coming back to work in their offices, most building populations cannot support opening a snack bar currently due to tele-work part-time and employees only coming to the office part-time. Now the BEP is working on a micro market, a self-check-out system. These are being placed in buildings with larger employee and visitor populations. The licensed vendors are doing well with them. The licensee must be available to ~~assisst~~ assist patrons on how to use the kiosk but other than that, they do their inventory, order items, stock shelves and refrigerators, and do not need to hire employees to perform these tasks. There are also third party contractors for other locations. If the agency gets referrals for potential licensees, the agency can look at where the third party contractors are and open the site up to a qualified blind vendor instead. BBVS has seven third party vendors, and most of them have more than one site. Their main training site, located in the Keystone Building in Harrisburg was lost. A fully staffed kitchen was available there where the licensee-trainees could work. A computer lab is still there and that was used for the trainees to do some of the online training modules provided by Hadley Institute Although the computers are still at the Keystone building, they are requesting removal of our computers for Keystone to take over our former space. Coming in early 2023, staff changes will occur. Jessica will become the acting coordinator and someone else will be the acting director. This will mean that BEP will have its full complement with regard to staff. Cathy asked Jessica about the accessibility features of the micro market kiosks. Initially the Commonwealth had only one vendor to bid, but now they had another vendor and that second vendor does provide more accessible kiosks. Two blind vendors elected to purchase their own kiosks. Because of increased accessibility, the Commonwealth has written in more precise mandated accessibility needs for the kiosks and therefore believes only accessible kiosks will be purchased for the Business Enterprises Program moving forward.. Pat Kane asked Jessica to explain the eligibility process for the Business Enterprises Program. She did. She further explained that BBVS has the first right of refusal when a federal or state building requests vending services for its employees. Based on the numbers provided by the building management, depending on what the building is looking for, it may be something the BEP cannot provide. The decision is left with the State Licensing Agency, in this case, BBVS and the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors, consisting of licensees. An example of why the State Licensing Agency would refuse to provide service is if a building had 30 employees and only needed one vending machine. That is not enough business to offer the blind vendor a possibility to make an adequate living. That ended her presentation. We appreciated it.

BVRS report: Pat Kane. The goal for Fiscal Year 2022-2023 (July 1, 2022--June 30, 2023) is 269 successful rehabilitations. We have 86 successful closures or 32%. Pat does supervise

some VR counselors and he knows there are challenges and unforeseen situations. Some counselors are working with people who need supported employment services, always challenging at best. Better would be closer to 50% but this is how things are at this time.

Staffing: One staff member decided to leave. Two staff transferred into new jobs just recently. Faylyn Frost came from the Williamsport office. While working there, she was within ~~thraeethree~~ miles of the New York line, just up Route 15. She will be working with transition students in the Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata counties. She has four years of experience doing this job in Potter and Tioga Counties. Brianna Brown transferred from being Early Reach Coordinator to a VRC in our office. She will be working with transitioning students in the Lebanon area. Amy Moore was promoted from Acting District Administrator to the District Administrator. The position of Assistant District Administrator is open. There are other VRC positions and an Early Reach Coordinator opening, and a Business Services position posting, but that position was withdrawn for now, hopefully we'll get to fill that position in the future.

Here is what occurred during National Disability Employment Awareness Month: BVRs held job fairs, there was an event in this office and that included mock interviews with customers. Also attended events at the Capitol, and the Disability Pride Day, also at the Capitol. And Again at the Capitol with Unique Source and finally there was a press event with the City of Harrisburg ad Goodwill, held a press event at City Hall for our transitioning youth. Each transitioning student got a business services award for participating in NDEAM through the MY Work initiative over the last two summers. A lot of youth worked over on City Island making things look better by painting things, cleaning it all up. News crews were there. Now we are gearing up for next summer. There are three internship programs for students going to college. One internship is with the Commonwealth, one is with Unique Service in Mechanicsburg, and one is with the Center for Independent Living of Central Pennsylvania. These people who work outside on City Island and the internships are working in real jobs for real pay while they get work experience. The more work experience young students get, the higher the probability that they will be successful in a full-time job after completing their high school or college education.

John Horst asked Pat if VRC's are meeting in person with their customers. Answer: yes! That has been going on now since July, 2021. BVRs VRC's do not do as many home visits as BBVS VRC's do. During all that time the building was not open for customers to visit us but VRC's would meet them at CareerLinks. Treassa asked for a list of BBVS VRC's and social work staff. Cathy asked if any of the BBVS customers are involved in the summer My Work program. Natalie was not able to answer that question but will research it for us Four days after this meeting she provided this statement. My Work was available to BBVS students the summer of 2022. We did not have any participants. Julie Jindra (Business Services Rep at Central Office) will be examining work sites for BBVS this year. There will be opportunities for BBVS students to participate. When I receive further information, I will make sure you are updated.

BBVS Report: Statistics and goals: currently have 298 customers in VR, an increase of 19 individuals since the last report in September, 2022. Closure goals are 52, with six successful closures to date. The Pre-ETS (blank) goal is 84. ILOB has ~~184-162~~ customers. The goal is 109 with ~~26~~ successful closures. SSC: 221 customers ~~with a goal of ___ with ___ closures and SSA~~ program has 15 customers ~~with 4 recent referrals~~. O&M: 42 customers. Goal is 102 with 25 successfully closed. VRT has 99 with the goal of 78. So far 24 successful closures.

Staffing: vacancies: VRC position and the VR Supervisor position. VRC position interviews occurred and a decision was made. Clerical Assistant II was hired and started working 11/14/22. J'Nae Kettoman is now a CT 3 11/14/22. Nicole Wade returned as D.A. 12/12/22. LOFA will

start 12/27/2022. VR supervisor hiring process is going on right now Interviewing the next two days weeks. Posting the D. CA. 2 and encourage job seekers to check employment at pa.gov for opportunities.

BBVS Summer Academy will be back for the summer of 2023. It will be held in State College at Penn State main campus from 06/24/2023 through 06/30/2023. This is the first one since COVID-19 shut everything down. They did hold Summer Academy during COVID but virtually. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation/Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Summer Academy Program is designed to offer high school age students with visual impairments an opportunity to develop their knowledge, experiences, and awareness as it relates to their future academic and employment goals. Students will participate in a week-long program on a college campus, where they will receive assessments, information, and educational experiences in various curriculum areas. The student application deadline for the Summer Academy is 02/01/2023. Contact VRC with questions.

Outreach, referrals and hiring are a priority. in hiring. Seeking assistance to get more referrals to both BBVS and BVRs. BBVS referrals to this date (7/1-11/30/22) are VR 51. Social-work 35 referrals. O&M 23 and VRT 53. SS-A 4 referrals.

The agency is exploring other community resources to reach out to. On 12/07/22 and 12/15/22 planning meetings were held for P.R. And Outreach. Social workers have been contacting the Area Agencies on Aging in their area and scheduling presentations with instructional support staff. Nan, an O&M Specialist, just met with the Department of Corrections, with their ADA Coordinator, Deputy Goodman, Major Oliver, and security personnel, to provide an overview of BBVS services and to discuss incarcerated inmates who may have blindness or visual impairments, and the use of a mobility cane in prison. It went well, and the prison approved the use of the NFB cane.

BBVS also was involved at the Capitol with Senator Tartaglia Tartaglione's, the Disability Awareness Day, Also had a Representative Torren Ecker senior expo, presentation at the Vision Corps Lebanon Support Group and met with the L.G. Health Physicians diabetes and endocrinology.

She highlighted the story of Lucas Lieby. He spoke at the OVR board meeting on 12/01/2022. He has received services from BBVS since age 8. He is working at Deloitte with the Commonwealth. He did his first two years of undergrad with the assistance of BBVS and the next two years at Weidner University in New Jersey. BBVS services identified access technology needs and had the equipment to do daily tasks. He credited part of his success to having service from BBVS identify AT needs and having equipment for daily tasks. He is determining his work goal and will do something in the realm of computers. He said His VRC, Freda Freda, was instrumental in his growth and development. She was eager to help. His major was computer science. This did not come without difficulty, but his VRC believed in him, encouraged him, supported him, and always made him feel that he could accomplish something greater. His VRC, Freda Freda, was on top of everything from day one according to Lucas. Lucas did do an internship with the Commonwealth at the Keystone building. He

worked with a wonderful group of people. Another VRC, Justin Christopher was also involved when ~~FreedaFreda~~ had medical leave as well as - Jessica Hanula, then VR Supervisor, both assisted to make sure Lucas had what he needed and assure a smooth transition. Lucas graduated Cum Laude. His accomplishments reflect the work ethic and many services and supports he received from BBVS, according to Lucas. He also stated that the programs make a difference and sharing his journey with everyone is so great.

Treassa asked Natalie about the BBVS referral process. They had a conversation about that: what was needed, and in what order. ~~I feel confident that this fairly new employee with VROGP has a better understanding now of what happens when and what she needs to do to help her customers get BBVS services.~~

Pennsylvania Council of the Blind just had its virtual convention. A decision has not been made if the next convention will also be virtual or if we can get enough people to travel for an in person convention. Each March the American Council of the Blind does a virtual seminar and Pennsylvania Council is involved with this. There are training sessions and meanwhile House and Senators are contacted to get appointments with them to discuss the legislative imperatives that ACB is trying to get the legislators to either sponsor them, get a house or senate number if they don't have one yet, and if the imperatives do, to ask the legislators to support the imperatives.

CAC elections were held. When Rodger Simmons was Chair, John Horst was assistant Chair. Rodger relocated to Florida, making John Chair. He does not wish to be Chair and asked for elections. Cathy nominated herself as Chair. No others volunteered. JOe Romeo seconded the motion and the motion was carried unanimously. Cathy then nominated Joe Romeo as vice-chair, and he agreed. He provided Cathy with his email address for Cathy and JOe to communicate. Cathy also provided her email address for Joe. John seconded the motion for Joe Romeo to be assistant Chair. It passed unanimously. We need someone to take the minutes for future CAC meetings. Cathy has been Secretary of the CAC since June of 2013, just after her retirement from BBVS. . Cathy will type the minutes for this meeting. It is hoped that someone would volunteer to write minutes for the March, 2023 meeting. At this time no one was willing so for now Joe Romeo and Cathy Long will each take a turn writing minutes for alternative meetings until we have a CAC secretary. Cynthia nominated herself. At this time share ride was coming and we had to go. The decision to postpone who would or would not be Secretary of the CAC was postponed until the March 21, 2023 meeting.

This ended this meeting. The meeting was adjourned by a motion which was seconded and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Long, Secretary