

## Northwest PA BBVS Citizen Advisory Committee Agenda – October 26, 2023

**Call to order:** Discussed whether there were enough participants on the call to have a quorum. There is a possibility of eight different agencies, and there must be at least three agencies on a call to have a quorum. There are at least three agencies represented on this call, so the quorum requirements have been met.

Meeting called to order at 10:17 by Krysta Carson

### Roll Call

- Casandra Falkenhagen, District Administrator, BBVS 814-871-4401 [cfalkenhag@pa.gov](mailto:cfalkenhag@pa.gov)
- Amy Adams, Clerical Assistant III, BBVS 814-871-4401 [amyadams@pa.gov](mailto:amyadams@pa.gov)
- Krysta Carson, Venango County Blind Association 814-676-1876 [kcarson@venangoblind.org](mailto:kcarson@venangoblind.org)
- Priscilla Earhart, Keystone Blind Association 724-347-5011 [PEarthart@KeystoneBlind.org](mailto:PEarthart@KeystoneBlind.org)
- Jenn Lilly, Keystone Blind Association 724-347-5011 [JennLilly@keystonblind.org](mailto:JennLilly@keystonblind.org)
- Andrew Pennington
- Eric Schreiber, Consumer, Oil Valley Chapter of Blind 814-927-5252
- Kim Graham

### Approval of Minutes

- Casandra asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the 4-27-2023 meeting as there was not a quorum at the last meeting on 7/13/2023 to approve the minutes. Priscilla made a motion to approve, and Krysta seconded the motion.

### Updates

#### BBVS Report

- Staffing: Casandra Falkenhagen has been promoted to DA. Alecia Beam's start date as ADA is 10-28-23. Karly Twaroski continues to TWOC as VR Supervisor. We have requested to fill the 2 VR Supervisor positions vacated by Cassie and Alecia. OM remains unfilled and we continue to use contractors we have in place to provide the services.
- OM services provided by Pilot Dogs – Pilot dogs completed a 1-week intensive program for 4 IL customers in OM. We had positive feedback from both the instructor and the customers.
- NDEAM – October is National Disability Awareness Month – participated with BVRS on a Job Club presentation for customers.
- Quick recap of the summer – providing as many services to Pre-ETS as possible
  - Envision Success Program was held June 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> and we had 4 students from our Specialized Services Program participate.
    - They worked on communication skills, they learned about advocacy, how to identify and solve problems, career opportunities and volunteering opportunities.
  - Summer Academy was held at PSU Main Campus and Erie BBVS had 1 student participate.
  - IDEAL Program was held and 1 student from Erie BBVS participated.
  - MY Work was completed. 2 students participated and received pay for part time work. We are expecting to replicate the program next year.

- Envision Blind Sports Camp – we had 1 student attend Envision Blind Sports camp where they participated in sports/recreation, improved health/wellness and gained knowledge of adaptive sports.
  - Paid Summer Internships - We had 2 students participate this program. One worked for a visual arts non-profit company setting up their computer systems. The other was part of the VFI summer internship program.
- Bioptics – this service is coming along...
  - BBVS supports this service in order to remove barriers to employment – getting to/from work and getting to/from worksite locations.
  - Ophthalmologist determines eligibility based on acuity (20/200 or better) and Field Restrictions (120)
  - Own bioptic telescope for 2 months
  - Complete 10 hours of front seat passenger-in-car instruction with LV Rehab Specialist (Jenn Lilly is approved as a provider through KBA by PennDot)
  - Sit for standard learner’s permit test (experienced drivers don’t need to do this)
  - Apply Bioptic Telescope Driving Permit (customer responsibility to pay)
  - Complete 20 hours of accompanied driving with Penn Dot approved CDI or CDRS and 45 hours of accompanied driving with licensed adult (experienced drivers only need 20 hours) – BBVS encourages all 65 hours be completed with a CDI or CDRS and will authorize for all 65 hours. We have 1 provider in Pitts area who is a provider for this portion.
  - Be assessed by CDI (certified Driving instructor) or CDRS (Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist)
  - Take standard driver’s license test with the bioptic.
  - Erie BBVS has 1 customer completing the 20-65 hours with CDI and one being referred for bioptics.
- **Venango County Association of the Blind (VCAB) – Presented by Krysta Carson**
  - Our focus in the last quarter has been a lot of outreach in the community and a lot of community events. I presented at the Venango Pomona Grange. Did a lot of health fairs. Did the UPMC for Women Only event at the local mall. We had our large annual fundraising and awareness event in September; was a very, good experience. We were able to educate community members and give them the experience of bowling blind. It was of the best we have had; we raised over \$6000 dollars.
  - We also have received a \$2400 dollar grant from the government to grow the agency, a capacity building grant. We used this for training staff, and to be able to replace old computer towers.
  - We have been running all over the county and doing what we do.
- **Oil Valley Chapter for the Blind – Presented by Eric Schreiber**
  - Currently our project is raising money to try to provide used and refurbished CCTVs to libraries. We have done two and are working on a third in Marionville. The libraries have all had request for large print books, so we have been working with Venango County Association for the Blind to find used and refurbished CCTVs.

- **Keystone Blind Association – Presented by Priscilla Earhart**

- We have also had fundraisers, our golf event, and the Big Sizzler event, which was a great event. We participated at Krysta's event, which was a wonderful experience.
- We are still looking for legally blind to work our Boyers contract, but really continuing to look for opportunities for people with no vision. For the Boyers contract, we are working to evaluate all of the employees abilities with computers, Jaws, Zoom Text, basically all skills. We are going to start at the basics, but we are finding that there are more things they can do with computers on the contract, so we are really trying to work with that, and build on that for more opportunities for people with low/no vision.
- Jenn – IDEAL happened in July for four weeks; we had one student from Erie BBVS, and they were a pleasure to have.
  - All the students got independent living skills along with specific training, assessments, braille, etc.
  - At the end of the program, all the students received a goodie bag of things for completing the program, Home Management instruction was their favorite class, and they utilized the devices after class. They received a mini blend, oven rack guards, bump dots, liquid level indicator, potholders, etc., and air pods for privacy. Each student received these as something to help them in each area they worked with. We had a total of nine students; it was a good summer.
- Priscilla – We did the White Cane walk, and BBVS did participate. We had a nice little turnout at Connelly Manor in Sharon. We did talks, demonstrations, and went for a walk. There was someone at the apartment complex who we did not know about, who were able to reach out to, always great outreach. Social director at the apartments and maintenance both joined us for the walk. They thought it was very interesting, and said they learned a lot. The Social Director knew someone to tell about services; there is usually always someone.
- Jenn – We have also been working with bioptic driving. In the future, we are planning on having a presentation about bioptic with Dr. Freeman, and we will make sure BBVS is informed about that. Dr. Freeman has been very involved in process, helped to write the law.
  - Priscilla- Clients are not understanding the law and what all is involved with bioptic driving.
    - Jenn – The clients that are involved right now are doing very well.

- **Andrew Pennington**

Did not have anything specific to speak about today.

- **James Whitonis** (Bureau of CO/VR Specialist, liaison to the PA Rehab Council and CACs)  
Not Present
- **The Sight Center of Northwest PA**  
Not present
- **PaRC Report - Presented by Heidi Tuszynski**  
Not present
- **Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania (ACBP)**  
Not present
- **Governor's Committee on Disabilities**  
Not present

### **Old Business**

There was no old business.

### **New Business**

Priscilla – A question for Cassie, where are you at with customer choice, for example, AT services? Are consumers being given customer choice.

Cassie- Yes, it is required that counselors give customers a choice regarding providers. Customers must be given at least three choices, if they are available. For AT we use vendors available in the customer's local area but expand out to the state if needed.

KBA – We have an AT tech specialist, is BBVS offering the services of the KBA tech?

Cassie -Yes, and Cassie will remind counselors of all the AT vendors.

Andrew- For informed choice, regarding CBVI or KBA, whichever customer decides is what BBVS or BVRS program has to use, correct? This is written in law.

Cassie -Yes

Eric – Expressed a concern that customer choice was not being provided.

Andrew – Any provider in the area can be made a provider.

Cassie - If they accept our fees, and complete the process to become a vendor.

Andrew – We need to be creative to find providers. There are provider issues across the state. Each service seems to have its shortcomings with regard to provider availability.

Eric – Expressed a concern on the time it takes for services to start.

Andrew – This is a consistent story with BBVS or BVRS. It is important that customers talk to their counselors if services are not being provided timely.

Krysta – If choosing a provider is truly customers choice, why are only three options provided?

Cassie – Three is the minimum.

Krysta – We have to give a list of doctors that offer that service.

Andrew – It is presented as a series of three, but is not limited to three. It is a process to become a provider. In a perfect world, we would give a sheet of 500 providers, but in-person services are not as simple as that.

CAP is a statewide advocate, separate from BBVS or BVRS. Consumers would contact us with concerns about services. We encourage anyone on this call who have individuals whose issues aren't being addressed to reach out.

Krysta – I hear you say this is a common problem, but it shouldn't be. When it is a pattern, and it is not client specific, it is happening to everyone, then it is a problem.

Andrew – there seems to be waits for a lot of services, not specific to BBVS or BVRS, BBVS is covering a larger area of land.

Krysta – Counselors need to follow up with consumers, with phone calls at least.

Andrew- Are you speaking of BBVS counselor or the provider itself?

Krysta - I don't know where the fault lies, but we have gone up the chain and nothing happens.

Andrew - Counselors should be acting as liaison between provider and consumer, but the provider should be reaching out as well regarding wait times, etc., and providing options. Consumer can then reach out to the counselor as well.

Krysta – I'm not sure if it is the whole process or the individual counselor?

Andrew – Cassie, are you having discussion with these agencies regarding concerns about counselors?

Cassie – Yes, if we receive concerns, we look into it.

Andrew – Are individuals being told about CAP?

Cassie – Yes

Andrew - This is a process, and the biggest issue is communication, IEP goals, informed choice. We look at the law and then what mechanics are available to help get through these issues.

Priscilla – Cassie, do your counselors know how far we will go for certain services? There is a possibility that your counselors might not know where we will go. Maybe we should revisit the coverage area?

Cassie- If we were working with someone who lives where Keystone provides services, we would start offering services in that area, then if no services are available we would move out to find the next closest.

Andrew - If a referral is rejected by an agency, CAP will ask counselor to go to next closest area. We can revisit maps, putting certain counties as negotiable. Counselors can ask on a case-by-case basis and would know they have a backup. This would expediate the process too, not having to call every provider. They would know who has these areas as providers.

Cassie – For one example, Bioptics, the only provider is in Cranberry, but customer was two counties over. We paid the transportation for the provider to get to him to provide the service. We try and work things out as best we can. This is not always possible, but we try. A revisit would be good. I will work with the supervisor on just going over some of these things, as 2 counselors have been here just over 1 year and our third counselor has only been here a couple of years.

Priscilla – For the old timers, things can become a habit, but we need to focus on customer choice. New counselors just have so much to learn. A revisit is good for all. Make sure consumers know they can ask.

Andrew – Consumers can contact anyone in our programs, and they can advocate as well. The request does not have to go through the counselor. We offer a lot of services on behalf of advocating for individual. We want a good relationship with the counselors, but we work on behalf of customers. We can act as a liaison and help find creative approaches to solve problems. We encourage self-advocacy on the customers behalf, asking if there are other options. Counselors would look into other options, with regard to travel, training, creative solutions.

Priscilla – Do you only work with people who are in the BBVS or BVRS programs? We have someone who is deaf/blind, and we need someone who can sign in her hand. Does CAP do that?

Andrew – Our function by law is OVR, VR, BBVS, and programs/projects funded under the Rehabilitation Act. This is not something we would be able to handle, but we can talk with various different platforms to open this up. I don't know what Human Services could do, but I would reach out. I would reach out to the Center for Independent Living for resources regarding that.

Cassie – The Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is a state agency, and I believe there are links or info on a list of providers on their website. Regarding deaf/blind services, we have one person in Erie County that we have been able to find that accept our fees and provide the tactile interpretation. If you could find an interpreter, they will be gold.

Andrew – There is a shortage of interpreters at every level. I would reach out to ODHH for more resources.

Krysta- I would reach out to the Helen Keller Center as well.

### **Next Meetings (Quarterly)**

- Choose dates for 2024 (once per quarter) The second Thursday of each month was chosen.

- Jan - January 11, 2024
- April – April 11, 2024
- July - July 11, 2024
- Oct - October 10, 2024

Cassie will send out the invites for the 2024 quarterly meetings.

**Motion to Adjourn**

Casandra asked for a motion to adjourn. Priscilla made the motion and Krysta seconded it. Meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.