

Northwest PA BBVS Citizen Advisory Committee Agenda – Jan 11, 2024

Roll Call:

Cassie Falkenhagen, BBVS District Administrator
Alecia Beam, BBVS Assistant District Administrator
Amy Adams, Clerk Typist III, BBVS 814-871-4401 amyadams@pa.gov
Jenn Lilly, Keystone Blind Association JennLilly@keystonblind.org
Priscilla Earhart, Keystone Blind Association 724-347-5011
PEarthart@KeystoneBlind.org

Eric Schreiber- Consumer 814-927-5252
Andrew Pennington-CAP
Tina – Keystone Blind Association
James Whitonis -Community Action Committee, BCO
Linda Moore

Call to order:

Meeting called to order at 10:05 by Cassie Falkenhagen, seconded by Priscilla Ehrhart.

Approval of Minutes

Cassie asked for a motion to approve the October 26, 2023 meeting minutes; Priscilla made a motion to approve, and Andrew seconded the motion.

Updates

• BBVS Report – Presented by Casandra Falkenhagen

- Staffing:
 - VRS: 1 position has been offered to only eligible candidate, 1 position will be reposted. Karly continues to TWOC.
 - SW: position has been posted
 - BSR: position has been posted.
 - OM: remains vacant – will repost April/May, hoping for some college graduates. Continue to use contractors.
- Andrew- What is the current wait time?
 - Cassie - 25 customers on the list, 16 being provided for right now. Providers are secondary, we provide referrals, providers only take what they can. We provide extra names so providers can work them in. Status 22, working, is first on the list, second are those actively looking for work, third is college students who need orientation to campus.
- IL -We refer those in danger of hurting themselves by falling or for safety purposes.
- SS-C -rely on TVI's for priority.
- Not referring many to OM so list is about 25,
- Priscilla – Are you still using Pilot Dogs?
 - Cassie - They only did one session over the summer.
 - Alecia – We prioritized IL customers who were not getting service.
- Biopic Driving Fees – increased – hoping to get more providers to agree to become vendors. \$200.00 per hour, mileage reimbursement remains \$1.00 per mile.
 - One customer is ready for driver's test with Penn Dot
 - Another customer is completing the 10 hours of front passenger instruction.

- Jenn Lilly - He is ready as of today for the next set of hours.
 - Working on identifying Pre-ETS students for summer programs.
 - Met with The Sight Center to discuss Low Vision Clinic
 - Alecia and Cassie presented on BBVS services to current Sight Center staff.
 - LVC: All services are being provided and paid for by Erie Retinal Research – LVE and Aids. BBVS will continue to put the service on the plan and follow up with customers when aids are received.
 - Andrew- Do individuals know there may be a wait if they want to wait for Erie?
 - Cassie -This is brand new information. Social workers are letting customers know there is a wait. They may already be on the wait list, and can continue to wait if they want, but there are other options. The Sight Center has been providing other options, checking every six months if they want to wait or go somewhere else. BBVS provides for cost of transportation if a customer wants to get the service sooner at another provider.
- **Venango County Association of the Blind (VCAB) – Presented by Krysta Carson**
No Report
- **Oil Valley Chapter for the Blind – Presented by Eric Schreiber**
Due to everything from health to weather to holidays, there is nothing current to update upon. We are going to continue with our project from last year, continue to provide CCTVs to public libraries.
- **Keystone Blind Association – Presented by Priscilla Earhart**
 - Liz is starting her first Voice Over class in Beaver County today. It will run for six weeks, three hours a session. If we find that six weeks is too long or too short, it will be adjusted. At least 12 people signed up for this class. BBVS refers people for classes, Jaws, etc., and we are working on replicating that. Most of the clients are PAB clients and may or may not have been approved by BBVS for the class.
 - Alecia- Does Liz have other classes scheduled other than the one in Beaver?
Jenn – She said as the need comes up, she will do one. She would like to do one in Erie or Crawford County but needs enough people. She can do individuals, but if there are lot of people, class is better.
Alecia – Is there a service authorization for that class?
Priscilla – yes. I'll give you're the contact information for Liz and Kim for how to set up for classes.
- Jenn and Liz have been working on getting our AT grant and everything up and running our outlying offices.
 - Jenn – We got many items through the PaB AT grant. We made sure we had items provided to our six facilities. We are training staff who are in the office on how to demonstrate the equipment to walk-ins and then being referred to appropriate staff.
 - We have Go-Vision, Acrobat, Visolux, IrisVision, Fusion, Jaws, iPad, MiniVision. For VRT Services, we have talking scales, talking clocks, talking watches, to have a showcase of what might be available.
 - Priscilla, - We are not going to be doing instruction, just demo.
 - Jenn - We don't hand out items, we do referrals. Anything with a lens is referred to the optometrist. Jenn is a VRT so she can make basic

assessment, but customers need full assessment, so we do referrals. This helps our office manager know who to refer people to

- Priscilla- Regina, our Director of Services is retiring in February, so we will be hiring. Would like someone with a degree, but not necessary if they have experience.
- Jenn – Keystone Kids program is coming out in the next week or so, so the flyer will be coming. We are working on getting more kids,
- Jenn- We are working on IDEAL stuff for July, and we have a mini weekend in April, the 19-21st. The program in July is four weeks; flyers will be sent out schools, BBVS, the IU's, PABs, etc.
 - Would BBVS be interested in talking about IDEAL for this year:
 - Cassie -Yes

- **Andrew Pennington (CAP)**

I wanted to give a shout out to Cassie about the Bioptic lenses. We had a case we had to advocate about the Bioptic lenses. We worked with the office regrading changing the rate for the Bioptic driving. Without these meetings we would not be able to know what was going on and how these things affect us.

- **James Whitonis (Bureau of CO/VR Specialist, liaison to the PA Rehab Council and CACs)**

I was reviewing all the minutes for CAC, and I did not see minutes for the July meeting. Were there minutes for that meeting?

- Cassie – Yes, informal minutes. I'll send them to you.
- James – I'll review the minutes and get the 2023 review finished for you.

- **The Sight Center of Northwest PA – Presented by Linda Moore**

We had the start-up of the low vision clinic at The Sight Center; we had our last low vision clinic on 6/6/2020. Our low vision practitioner left Erie, and we have been looking for a new practitioner, but have had zero success with Covid. Erie Retina Research is brand new, has a low vision optometrist that they have offered to share with The Sight Center. We are now conducting the Low Vision Clinic twice a month. The optometrist is fresh out of college, getting her feet wet, so is only seeing a couple of customers a day. Erie Retina Research is paying for her services to The Sight Center, so we don't have to bill anyone else, absolutely free for the patient. Erie Retina Research has also set aside money to draw money for devices.

I am concerned that Erie Retina Research does not know what they are spending. The Almeida's come from Canada, with socialized health care, and want customers to have exactly what they need immediately. The Sight Center and BBVS are going to get everyone on a level playing field, get the basics and get started with their rehab to start. We are going to refer everyone to BBVS and BBVS can work with them in their time.

- Andrew – Devices are different than services, is everyone being referred to BBVS or just getting devices? Use caution with giving devices before job goals are defined as device might not be compatible with job goal and job needs. Referrals should be made to BBVS at the Low Vision Clinic to keep everyone on the same goal.

- Jenn - Do you have someone on staff outside of the clinic who can help with incorrect devices?
 - Linda – No, not at the moment, but the case manager is learning. We are more likely to call the bureau for that, or the optometrist herself. She is dispensing her own devices, wants people to come back to the clinic after three weeks to see how they are using the devices.

The Sight Center now has two new vehicles, so our fleet is increased by one car.

We have a new case manager, Mason Reininger, and new drivers in the counties.

- Cassie – Has Jim's position been replaced in the county?
 - Linda - No, running it out of our office. We have two good drivers out in the county. Mason will be traveling the counties at least once a month to get started.

- **PaRC Report – Submitted by Heidi Tuszynski**

- The PA Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) held its most recent meeting virtually in October. The Council appreciates everyone's participation including OVR Executive Director / Leadership Team and PaRC stakeholders. Special thanks to Michael Gamel-McCormick, Senate Special Committee on Aging, Disability Policy Director for U.S. Senator Bob Casey for presenting on policies that cover employment and disability related topics. The Council also thanks Kristin Ahrens, Deputy Secretary for Pennsylvania's Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) for providing an overview presentation on the ODP's collaboration with OVR and CIE efforts. Members also very much appreciate updates provided by the OVR Erie District Office Administrators Jack Hewitt, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) and Cassandra Falkenhagen, Bureau of Blind and Visual Services (BBVS).
- During the October meeting Full Council provided approval of the 2024 meeting dates and format, reviewed a draft of the PaRC Annual Report Covers, and recommended forwarding Sylenthia Dent-Siebenlist's application, resume, and letters of reference to the Governor for consideration of appointment to the PaRC representing the category of General Advocacy.
- A PaRC member attended the 2023 Fall CSAVR Conference and NCSRC training held in Savannah, Georgia in October. Members also plan to represent PaRC at the PDE Conference in late February.
- The PaRC continues to provide outreach and council awareness to the public and OVR stakeholders. The Council's Social Media Committee announced that the PaRC's social media presence is expanding with the launching of [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages. The Committee continues to create and share engaging content to attract more followers, cross posting with stakeholders, and has begun collaboration with a Veteran Owned, Veteran Business Enterprise, SDB for web maintenance and digital media services. PaRC members recently met with more than 18 State Legislators and/or their staff in mid-November to inform and educate on the importance of continued full funding of OVR, ODHH advocacy efforts for their SSP program, the benefits of a potential phase out of 14(c) Certificates/Subminimum wage, and many other diverse issues affecting employment of people with disabilities.
- Lastly, the next Full Council Quarterly meeting will be held in a virtual only format through Zoom on February 14th. PaRC will be holding additional Full Council Quarterly meetings on May 15th (hybrid), August 14th (hybrid), and November 13th (virtual only). Hybrid meetings will be held in the Harrisburg area with an option to attend virtually through Zoom. I would like to thank the State Board for their support.

- **Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania (ACBP)**

No Report

- **Governor's Committee on Disabilities**

- No report per Heidi Tuszynski

Old Business

Cassie: I just want to provide a follow up to the situation that was brought up last meeting. While the information shared in the meeting was about a specific customer, I cannot share any specifics in public, so I just wanted to report that I researched the situation on 10-26-23 (same day) and contacted Priscilla to provide follow up (same day) since I had a release of information to KBA. To address the specific complaints provided: (1) lack of options of providers – I found in the counselor's notes that 3 options for the service were offered and the chosen provider was added to the plan and (2) services took too long to provide – I found one unacceptable time frame from meeting, to plan written/sent for signature/entered into CWDS, authorization of services, obtain signature on FNT and 2 unanswered calls to the customer for follow up – the unacceptable time delay was addressed with the counselor. As a result of the meeting, I asked the counselor to make additional calls to the customer to discuss the situation and arrive at a mutually agreed upon plan.

Cassie: Eric expressed a concern that customer choice was not being provided. BBVS has 3 levels of case reviews completed quarterly...this is one of the areas that is looked at, so it is taken very seriously. Cassie also had VR supervisor provide a follow up training on customer choice and how to identify available vendors.

Cassie: Krysta expressed a concern that customers are not receiving communication – Cassie had VR Supervisor stress importance of keeping the customer in the loop regarding delays in services.

Cassie: Priscilla asked for a list of BBVS staff. Cassie sent PABs the list of staff with email address and the counties they serve on 10-27-23. I asked for a similar list from the PABs.

Cassie: Priscilla expressed a concern that KBA was not being provided as a vendor for AT services. Cassie had VR Supervisor remind VRCs of availability of KBA AT provider and this can be reinforced when KBA provides the list of services they can provide as discussed above.

Cassie: Priscilla expressed a concern that BBVS did not have an updated copy of the services each PAB can provide and the counties they serve. In the 10-27-23 email Cassie requested the following information:

- Services you can provide as fee for service
- Counties you are able to serve (for each service if the coverage area differs)
- Times of year you can provide the services
- A contact person/email address for each service in case BBVS staff has questions
- If you have any referral forms/specific information you need other than the information already provided on the PO
- Any additional information you can think of that may be helpful to BBVS staff authorizing for services.

Information was collected from The Sight Center of NWPA, Venango County Blind Association and Keystone Blind. This information was distributed to all BBVS EDO staff.

New Business

No new business

Next Meetings (Quarterly)

- April – April 11, 2024 10:00 – 12:00
- July - July 11, 2024 10:00 – 12:00
- Oct - October 10, 2024 10:00 – 12:00

Motion to Adjourn

Cassie asked for a motion to adjourn. Linda made the motion, and Priscilla seconded it. Meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.