

CAC MINUTES
Friday, January 12, 2024
10:00 a.m. Virtual

In Attendance: Bob Mecca, LIFT; Chris Roken, OVR DuBois DO; Andrew Pennington, CAP; Jim Whitonis, OVR Central Office; Diana Kreydt, PSU DuBois; Kelly King, The Peal Center; Adam Bell, PA Link.

Welcome: Bob Mecca opened the meeting. There were no questions or changes to October 2023 meeting notes.

OVR Updates

Chris Roken advised the CAC that since Chris Palmer has been named Acting Bureau Manager, he has been named Acting District Administrator at the DuBois DO. As of March 1st, he will have 25 years with the Commonwealth. He has held multiple positions over the years including Dorm Counselor at HGAC, Therapeutic Activities Worker at Harrisburg State Hospital, positions at Central Office doing contracts and grants, and positions including VRC, Job Placement, Supervisor, ADA and Acting DA at DuBois and Johnstown District Offices.

CTI/HGAC update: A staff person from the center came in on October 25th. They gave a talk about getting counselors involved. Our counselors give it as an option when appropriate – trying to educate that it is a viable option for our customers. Chris has worked there in the past and is an advocate of it.

WEXA: Trying to help adults with work experiences out in the community. Currently we are only working with Goodwill -- we have 5 customers working with them. We will have more information to report in the future about how it is going.

My Works: We are getting ready for it this summer. Working with Boys & Girls Club and the Borough of Emporium (Elk, Cameron, and McKean). We are in talks with both the YMCA in Bigler (Clearfield) and the Borough of Punxsutawney (Jefferson) working with general maintenance, painting, cleaning, etc. My Work is a great work experience for kids for the summer. Bob Mecca of LIFT stated that regarding the Boys & Girls Club in St. Marys, he wanted to mention that it is a 3-story building with no elevator in case we have kids with physical disabilities -- it is not an accessible building. They are aware of the issue and are working towards getting an elevator.

Chris gave an OVR staffing update. We did hire an individual who will be starting on Tuesday, January 16. Kristopher Smeal will be a transition counselor in Johnsonburg, Kane, and Bradford. For the first month or two he will be headquartered out of DuBois and going out in the field with other counselors for training. Christy Patterson is going to be his supervisor, and current VRC Tawnya Cordwell will be working with him as well while we get the transfer of coverage done. Bob Mecca indicated that in the past Chris Palmer would introduce a new staff person to the CIL and all their services and have them attend a staff meeting of theirs. Chris thanked Bob and advised that he would like to do that as well. He will let Supervisor Christy Patterson know as well.

In other staffing news, Chris advised that DuBois is looking at another ERC for working with the students in the northern area. Our new clerical is doing great, and our new fiscal person is just getting off probation and has been great as well.

Chris advised that Farm Mods and Small Business are now being handled by Supervisor Kari Overheim. Any Vehicle Mods and Home Mods are still being handled by him. Feel free to contact him with any questions.

Beginning in February, driver services will look different for us – fee codes and rates are changing. Services offered will include: Learner Permit, Clinical Driver Assessment, Non-Adaptive Driving Evaluation, Non-Adaptive Driver Training, Adaptive Driver Evaluation, High-Tech Adaptive Driver Training, Low-Tech Adaptive Driver Training, Adaptive Vehicle Fitting Consult. Also, a final checkout will be required for any non-tech equipment now as well.

Chris asked the CAC if anyone had any questions for him. Andrew Pennington of CAP had a question about numbers at the DO level for trial work experiences. How many customers are currently in one and how long have they been in it? Chris will try to get that information for the next meeting. Andrew stated that CAP's concern is they have seen some pretty aggressive wait times for people in those statuses and they are trying to understand why there is such a long wait. CAP wants to be sure if someone is put in that status that they are given the assessments to make a decision as soon as they can. Chris stated that most of those individuals are put through with Community Based Work Assessment. They try to give the person every possible avenue before giving a yes or no. He will get those numbers for Andrew.

Member Updates

LIFT: Bob Mecca stated that LIFT is going to be starting to work on the youth conference which is the first week of May – date to be determined. They cover Potter, Cameron, Elk, Jefferson, Clearfield, and McKean. Students with IEPs are invited to attend. It will be virtual this year. Last year there were no students from Clearfield or Jefferson. They have a lot of speakers and varied topics; everyone enjoys it.

OVR Central Office: Jim Whitonis stated he did look at the Rehab Council's website and will add Chris Roken to the DuBois DO information. He informed the CAC that in December they held our Public Comment period on the OVR portion of the State Plan draft and developed responses to the comments and made minor additions to the State Plan in response. This week, both PaRC and the State Board held special meetings to vote to approve our State Plan draft. They both approved the draft without issue. In March OVR and the Workforce Development Board will submit our Combined State Plan to RSA for their approval.

CAP: Andrew Pennington informed that CAP is seeing a steady increase in caseloads. A lot of different issues with regards to Trial Work Experience. He is currently working on various policy work groups. Andrew asked if Bob Mecca or Chris Roken experience transportation issues with people in our areas – transportation and driver services. Bob Mecca stated that transportation has always been one of the main calls they get from people – a lot have to do with the hours that transportation is available here. Andrew asked if Bob directed them to the Office of Long Term Living or any other department of Human Services waiver programs. Bob said the first question they ask is if they are on a waiver -- they have a program there called "Ramps of Hope" where they put in ramps for people. They refer a lot to them and refer to any type of funding provider that they can for services. Andrew noted that they get the same thing at CAP. He asked Bob if they also ask if the individual is employed just in case OVR can help. Bob assured that they do. Andrew stated that CAP gets a lot of calls where the individual is working and doesn't know about OVR, or they think that CAP is OVR. They make referrals to OVR daily. He also noted that cities have transportation issues as well due to population needs. Bob Mecca added that LIFT is part of the statewide advocacy group, and they are working on transportation issues. Andrew asked Chris Roken if he sees the same issues. Chris noted that yes, the ability to have options is what really hurts us – if we lose one provider in this area, it is a huge loss. Also, the hours of

service is a big factor. Andrew saw a post on LinkedIn for OVR where they are looking for providers for transportation which was encouraging to see. Jim Whitonis of CO stated that we are always looking for transportation providers – it constantly comes up in meetings especially for people in our rural areas. Bob Mecca added that it is an issue in all of LIFT’s counties.

PSU DuBois: Diana Kreydt stated that classes begin on Monday from winter break. This semester they are putting on an art show (open to the public) on February 28th from 4-7 pm in the PAW Center. Kelly King asked if there is a flyer that Diana can send out. Diana will send Aimee a flyer that can be sent out to the CAC to be shared. Kelly King asked Diana with DuBois Business College now closed, is PSU seeing an increase in those types of students. Diana answered that they did get some students initially and it was a mess for them because the credits didn’t transfer, and a lot of students owed money. They haven’t seen that in a while.

The PEAL Center: Kelly King informed the CAC that their Executive Director is leaving in about a week or so and will be going to Achieva. They continue to have their youth coffee hours in the evenings (she can share that information). Youth leadership academies are doing well – need to get self-advocacy skills to students. Seeing a lot of problems with individuals who transition from school into the adult world with autism being folded into ID. It seems like there is a gap with adult service providers.

PA Link: Adam Bell updated that the PA Link is scheduled to have a SAVE Training Event on March 19th from 10 – 11:00 am via teams (Suicide Prevention for Veterans). Bob Mecca asked if there is a flyer that Adam get it to Aimee so she can send it out to the CAC.

Other Business: Bob Mecca stated that he was at a meeting with Erin Chapman, Educational Consultant for IU10 in Philipsburg. He told her about this group. She couldn’t make it today, but he is hoping she can for future meetings. Kelly King stated that if the IU’s Transition Coordinator Council has never been talked to about the agencies involved with the CAC, it may be a good idea. Bob noted that he recently did one for Erin at IU10, and he would like to get them involved with the CAC. Kelly thinks getting them involved would be great for the students. It was discussed that Erin Chapman works with IU10 and Brett Lasko works with IU9. Kelly King will check the contact at IU6. Chris Roken advised that we can get them on our list. Brett Lasko is on the CAC listing already.

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be held Friday, April 12th, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. Meeting can be kept as virtual, on location or hybrid. Details will be sent later.