

MINUTES
DBVI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL
Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Held Via Zoom Teleconference
June 12, 2020

SRC Attendees

Christine Appert, Chair, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Tammy Burns, Midlothian, Representative of Virginia's Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center; Irene Conlin, Virginia Beach, Representative of an Individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty representing him or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent him or herself; Wanda Council, Newport News, VA, Representative of the Virginia Department of Education; Justin Graves, Fairfax, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor; Ray Hopkins, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Ken Jessup, Virginia Beach, Representative of Disability Advocacy Group; Larysa Kautz, Alexandria, Representative of Community Rehabilitation Services Program Provider; Jenny McKenzie, Roanoke, Representative of Business, Industry, and Labor; Mark Roane, Vice-Chair, Richmond, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Shelesha Taylor, Richmond, Representative of the federally mandated Client Assistance Program (CAP).

Members Absent

Julie Akers, Representative of Business, Industry and Labor

DBVI Staff to the SRC

Pam Hinterlong, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Services, DBVI; Maggie Mills, Executive Assistant for Services, DBVI; Richard Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services.

Guest

Deborah Collard, Program Analyst, DBVI.

Public Attending

Elizabeth Conlin

Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

Chair Appert called the meeting to order. Ms. Hinterlong welcomed and identified those on the call. Quorum was met.

Adoption of Agenda

Ms. Kautz moved to adopt agenda; Mr. Roane seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Approval of December 2019 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Kautz moved to accept the December 2019 meeting minutes as presented; Ms. Conlin seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Elizabeth Conlin stated she has been a client of DBVI since she was 15 years old. She praised the services she has received from the agency and appreciates the assistance she has received from her job coach with the Choice Group. She stated that the virtual training she has received during the pandemic has been excellent. She especially appreciates the fact that she did not have to travel to obtain training.

Commissioner's Report – *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

The Commissioner shared how DBVI has been operating during the last few months due to the COVID-19 pandemic adapting practices to continue delivering services. Most staff have been teleworking. Some staff who work in manufacturing facilities like VIB and the LRC are working onsite, and some continue to operate under VIB and the Randolph-Shepherd Program on federal property where services are deemed essential. VIB is part of the Commonwealth's emergency supply chain for the pandemic, so VIB has procured and made supplies available to federal and state agencies, private service providers and citizens.

Plans are underway for a safe return of face-to-face services in the Agency's facilities. Staff will be contacting clients to arrange in-home services if agreeable to the client and if the conditions are safe for both staff and clients. Staff will wear masks when they interact with the public and will ask clients to do the same. Some virtual services that have been provided online during the state of emergency will continue.

It is anticipated that the General Assembly will reconvene to adjust the budget accordingly due to the pandemic and recent community unrest. The Agency could expect cuts from what has been its base. There are hopes for another Recovery Bill to assist with budget adjustments. The Secretary of Education recommended some waivers which were sent to Congress which would give some relief to Vocational Rehabilitation. DBVI is keeping an eye on its ability to match the federal grant for the current fiscal year. The closing of businesses and Executive Orders to stay at home have impacted its highway vending program and a large percentage of the revenue received through that program and expenditures count towards the match. Twenty-seven of the thirty-five participants of the program had facilities that were closed or whose operations were largely reduced as a result of the pandemic. If the Agency is not able to match the grant, the Agency will need to ask for an extension.

Deputy Commissioner's Report – *Dr. Richard Mitchell*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

Staff have been very flexible and innovative in continuing to provide services. Dr. Mitchell has been collecting data on client engagement which reflects a great deal of work still being conducted in the Services Division, specifically in the VR Program. The Business Relations Team has been innovative with virtual training for career seekers, including learning about elevator speeches and dressing for success. There have been targeted discussions for those interested in becoming a Social Worker. The CPID, Leap into Linux academy that was scheduled for June and then postponed until August, due to the pandemic is now being rescheduled for next year. The Services Division has been working on reopening services to include face-to-face interactions while keeping clients and staff safe.

The Staunton Regional Office is about to make an offer on their VR Counselor vacancy. Once this candidate is brought on board, all VR Counselor positions in the Staunton office will be filled.

VR Program Update – Pam Hinterlong

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

Monthly VR Training has continued via teleconference during the pandemic.

Leap Into Linux, the DBVI hands-on career exploration for Students and Youth with Disabilities, has been moved from its original late June dates to summer of 2021. Linux follows three years of successful Robotics Academy cohorts coordinated by DBVI and supported by CPID. New, fully accessible curriculum is being designed by Dr. Chuck Gardner and Dr. Tommy Gober of the Cyber Innovation Center, a Department of Homeland Security grant funded non-profit.

VRCBVI has done a fantastic job conducting virtual trainings these last few months.

The Business Relations Team formed a virtual statewide training called “Career Connections”, Explore Sector Chats and a Virtual Career Club for individuals being served out of the Staunton Regional Office.

Earlier this week, Tish Harris, DBVI’s CPID Project Coordinator, presented on Career Pathways to a national community.

This year the LIFE program will look a bit different as it will be held virtually instead of in person at VRCBVI due to the COVID-19 situation.

STEPS to Success (Strategies & Techniques for Enhancing Performance & Skills) is a brand new partnership with the University of Richmond. It is a two-week collaborative program between the University of Richmond’s School of Professional & Continuing Studies and VRCBVI. This innovative program will introduce valuable skills, techniques, and strategies to help maximize participants’ success in preparing for college or careers. The program will be held virtually this year instead of in person at VRCBVI due to the COVID-19 situation. We are in the planning and development stages and are looking forward to a great kick off year of this exciting new program.

Old and/or New Business

Hearing Officer Contract Extension and Renewal – Pam Hinterlong

Due to the pandemic, no applications for the Hearing Officer positions were received, it has been reposted. There is a need to extend and renew the contracts of the current Hearing Officers. Chair Appert requested approval to renew Hands’ contract for another year from October 1, 2020, to September 30, 2021, and approval to extend Byers’ contract for six months from October 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021, due to the delay of ISP. Ms. Council motioned the approval, and Ms. Conlin seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Annual Report – Christine Appert

Chair Appert will begin working on the Annual Report with Ms. Hinterlong. Mr. Graves has already begun working on Success Stories to include. Chair Appert invited members to contact her should

they be interested in assisting with preparing the Annual Report or if any member has ideas or recommendations.

2020-2021 SRC Chair/Vice Chair - *Christine Appert*

Chair Appert reminded the members that at the next SRC Meeting in September the Council will elect the SRC Chair and Vice Chair for next year. She asked members to start thinking about nominees.

SRC Members - *Pam Hinterlong*

Ms. Hinterlong advised that there are currently several SRC member vacancies. If anyone has recommendations for new members to fill these vacancies let Ms. Hinterlong or Ms. Mills know.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey – *Deborah Collard, Program Analyst, Administration Division, Policy and Evaluation Team, DBVI*

At the March SRC Meeting, Ms. Collard advised that DBVI's goal was to increase the response rate on its Consumer Satisfaction Surveys. In order to do this the Evaluation Team has worked on adjusting its focus on three areas: communications, utilization of resources, and updating the actual survey questions.

The Evaluation Team is updating closure letters in AWARE to refer to the Consumer Satisfaction Survey so that individuals receiving services would be advised that the survey was forthcoming.

Communications Focus Update: The VR Training in May focused on providing an overview of the functions and activities of the SRC and the partnership that the SRC has with the Consumer Satisfaction Survey. The Evaluation Team has been in discussion with the VR Counselors to get their perspectives on what they think would make individuals want to participate in the surveys and what the Counselors would like to learn from the individuals.

Utilization of Resources Focus Update: The Evaluation Team is continuing to explore ways to receive assistance with follow up activities so that individuals are contacted in ways other than email and online outreach.

Updating Actual Survey Questions Focus Update: The Evaluation Team has received feedback from the SRC and Counselors and other state SRCs as well. As many VR Programs that exist, there are just as many ways that Consumer Satisfaction Surveys are conducted. DBVI has reviewed ten other states and is considering using some of the things these states do if they fit the needs of our Agency.

The Agency VR Report for June includes the current Customer Satisfaction Survey which includes questions about accessibility, VRC and consumer relationships, VR services, technology, how services were received, employment outcomes, potential barriers and overall satisfaction. The SRC will be sent specific survey recommendations in late July for their review.

Ms. Collard asked the SRC for feedback on what they would like to see in the survey, what they feel the priorities should be and recommended the questions they suggest be actionable. The SRC should send feedback to Ms. Hinterlong or Ms. Mills.

DBVI would like to develop and have a new survey approved for use in the start of the new federal fiscal year October 1, 2020.

Representative Round Table

Tammy Burns – (PEATC) Parent Education Advocacy Training Center

PEATC works to build positive futures by empowering individuals with disabilities through education and training. PEATC had been operating via some virtual applications prior to the pandemic, so operations have not changed much except for the cancellation of in-person trainings and consultations which has now been transitioned to virtual platforms. PEATC is offering several parent leadership training opportunities in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education this summer. Through a small Pre-ETS grant PEATC is partnering with DARS to conduct Youth Empowerment workshops.

Wanda Council – (VDOE) Virginia Department of Education

The Virginia Department of Education leads and facilitates the development and implementation of a quality public education system that meets the needs of students and assists them in becoming educated, productive, responsible, and self-reliant citizens. Ms. Council's work focuses on Special Education and Instructional Services. She collaborates with DBVI in providing educational services for students who are blind and for those in Special Education programs. Schools are closed for the remainder of the school year due to the pandemic, but schools have been able to provide instruction virtually. In Phase 2 of Virginia's reopening some students will be able to attend school during the summer. Plans are underway for instruction in the fall. Plans are as diverse as the geographic locations of the schools. Multiple task forces have been working together to develop recommendations on how to operate when schools reopen.

The Virginia Vision Impairment Training Project is a professional development opportunity for selected Virginia educators and related service providers who will work with young children with vision impairments in Virginia public school special education programs during the 2020-2021 school year. The training sessions will be conducted online for approximately 11 weeks beginning August 18, 2020, through November 6, 2020. The virtual training sessions will occur weekly on Tuesdays from 3:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. In addition, approximately seven hours of on-site training will be scheduled with participants at designated Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired Regional Offices.

Ken Jessup – (ACB) American Council for the Blind

The ACB works to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people. On May 15, 2020, ACB filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice Disability Rights Section, to emphasize the inaccessibility of absentee voting for persons who are blind and visually impaired in the state of Idaho during the 2020 primary election. This submission was a supplemental complaint to one filed by Disability Rights Idaho (DRI) on April 23, 2020. The complaint filed by DRI stressed concerns about the lack of information being provided for voters with disabilities regarding accessibility options so that voters can maintain their right to vote independently during the May 19, 2020, primary election.

Larysa Kautz - Melwood

Melwood supports children, youth and adults of differing abilities to work and play where and how they choose by providing employment, job training, life skill improvement, supportive and recreational services to people of differing abilities. Melwood has been exploring virtual support and working to prevent isolation to those with disabilities during this stay-at-home pandemic. In the past, Melwood has mainly had outreach to its local community; however, the requirement of providing virtual services during the last few months has opened a door to provide support outside of the surrounding community. Melwood is hoping for additional funding to ensure that individuals have the equipment they need for virtual experiences. Melwood has been teaching technology skills from Microsoft certifications to Cybersecurity certifications. Melwood has a tech lab in Arlington and Maryland and are now partnering with technology companies to offer free online trainings. Melwood is working with Arlington County and DARS to gain additional funding. In the past Melwood has conducted camps every summer, but this year it is planning weekly virtual classes to include equestrian, culinary, communications, independent living skills and a "Camp in the Box" where parents receive all that is needed to participate in these virtual sessions.

Shelesha Taylor – (dLCV) Disability Law Center of Virginia

The dLCV works to advance independence, choice and self-determination; protect legal, human and civil rights; and eliminate abuse, neglect and discrimination of people with disabilities through legal advocacy and representation. dLCV monitors state institutions and facilities, mental health hospitals and children's units making sure patients and clients are getting the services and education they need. dLCV has been working closely with the Department of Education during this pandemic. The communities unit is working with individuals in group homes and assisted living facilities to ensure they are still protected and still have access to services best a possible. The dLCV usually operates with in-person visits, but during this pandemic it has been virtually monitoring. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is still ongoing working with DARS and DBVI.

Adjournment

Mr. Graves motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Council seconded the motion. All were in favor.