

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
State Rehabilitation Council Meeting
Meeting Minutes (Draft)
March 8, 2014

SRC Member Attendees

- John Bailey, Fairfax, VA, Chairman SRC, represents Business, Labor, and Industry
- Melanie Brunson, Vienna, VA, Past- Chair, represents Consumer Advocacy Groups, Rebecca Bridges, Arlington, VA, Vice-Chair, SRC; represents Business, Labor, and Industry
- Rick Gonzalez, Springfield, VA, represents VA Workforce Council
- Ken Jessup, VA Beach, VA, represents State Independent Living Council,
- Valerie Walker, Newport News, VA, represents Business, Labor and Industry
- Ray Hopkins, Richmond, VA, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member
- Nicole Jeffords, Norfolk, VA, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member

Members Absent:

- Richard Holley, Hallwood, VA, represents Disability Advocacy Groups

Members of the Public:

- Ann Oliff, Richmond, VA, represents current or former recipients of services, appointed but not confirmed
- Judy Swystun, Hampton Roads, VA, represents Community Rehabilitation Providers, appointed but not confirmed,
- Elizabeth Horn, Chesterfield VA, represents the Client Assistance Program administered by the disAbility Law Center of VA, not yet appointed to the SRC
- Wanda Council, Newport News, VA, represents the Virginia Department of Education, not yet appointed to the SRC
- Wanda Taylor, Fairfax, VA, President, National Federation of the Blind

DBVI Staff to the SRC

Rick Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services, DBVI

Susan Payne, VR Director, DBVI, Staff Liaison to SRC

Marcus L. Byrd, II, Administrative Staff, DBVI

Ramona Miller, Administrative Assistant for Services, DBVI, SRC

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Bailey welcomed all in attendance. The attendees were invited to introduce themselves, tell a little about themselves and what organizations they represent. After introductions Chairman Bailey invited the Council to join him in welcoming Wanda Taylor who is interested in the SRC. The Chairman hopes Ms. Taylor will find the Council interesting and engaging enough that she will choose to become a member in the near future.

Chairman Bailey announced that he and the Vice-Chair, Rebecca Bridges, would have to leave early due to a change in their train schedule. Melanie Brunson, Past-Chair offered to conduct the meeting thereafter.

- **Approval of the Agenda:** There are no added items, but the order of items has been changed. The modified agenda will be: Welcome; Introductions, Approval of Agenda; Approval of December Meeting Minutes; Public Comments; Action Items about sending a member to the conferences this spring that we should vote on; Appointment of State Plan Committee; Results from Yesterday from Rebecca Bridges, DARS Report from Ken Jessup; Commissioner's Report; Deputy Commissioner's Report; Agency Report by Susan Payne; Working Lunch; Old and New Business; Next Meeting Date: June 14, 2014. Any questions, changes? There were none. It was moved by Melanie Brunson and properly seconded to accept the modified agenda. It was passed.
- **Approval of the December 2013 Meeting Minutes:** It was moved by Melanie Brunson and properly seconded to approve the December 2013 Meeting Minutes. The next meeting date will be June 14, 2014. All were in favor to approve the December 2013 Meeting Minutes. No one opposed.

Comments from the Public

There were no comments.

Action Items

- **Conferences to be held this spring:** There are three conferences this spring... the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils, (NCSRC) the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAAVR) and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). The Chairman stated there are three conferences and part of our mandate is to have members attend those conferences. Mr. Bailey as Chair will attend on behalf of the Council. Mr. Bailey accepted the recommendation and will attend all three conferences. The NCSRC meets on Saturday and Sunday, April 5-6; CSAVR meets on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday April 7-9th (morning) and the NCSAB meets Wednesday – Friday, April 9th (afternoon) -11, 2014. Mr. Bailey is available to attend all three. It was moved by Melanie Brunson and seconded that

Mr. Bailey will attend the spring Rehab Agency meetings April 5-11, 2014 on behalf of the Council. All were in favor. No one opposed. The Chairman thanked the Council.

- **Kick off of State Plan Committee:** The Chairman thanked everyone for their hard work at yesterday's Retreat. There were many great recommendations but the council needs to go through and clarify them. As a part of the SRC bylaws, there is a State Plan working group. Mr. Bailey volunteered to head the group; Ms. Bridges and Ms. Brunson volunteered to assist the Chairman. Commissioner Hopkins reminded Chairman Bailey that when adding members to the working group, the SRC gets into the issue of whether work group meetings becomes a public meeting. Ms. Brunson stated since the three of them lived in northern Virginia, they could meet in a public place. Ms. Payne thought that the restriction of members should be explained for the benefit of new members. Ms. Brunson explained that Virginia has restrictive Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) laws that the SRC is subject to. When there are three or more participants and a staff person present, it must be a public meeting and must be posted on Townhall to give notice to allow the public to attend. Ms. Brunson indicated she would not participate due to FOIA requirement; Ms. Bridges and Mr. Bailey will serve on this group.
- **Review of the Retreat:** Ms. Bridges stated that everyone was enthusiastic, engaged and actively participated and the SRC accomplished quite a bit. There was an overview of the SRC and DBVI, and an activity where the SRC broke into small groups and discussed key questions: "What are your strengths?" "What motivates you?" and "What skills do you feel you bring to the SRC?" The group reported out the responses to the questions using a facilitated process and recognized that there was a lot of shared energy on strengths and the things that motivate the SRC and expertise in areas of interest.

Deborah Collard, Program Analyst for DBVI discussed the work that is being done on the Consumer Satisfaction Surveys. There were a lot of great questions that were asked and the group put together some action items for the Council to discuss.

State Plan Discussion

There were many excellent ideas but the two primary areas of focus were Marketing and **Employment**. The SRC reviewed the recommendations from last year. Ms. Brunson facilitated the session. The SRC removed quite a few because a lot of things have been accomplished by DBVI or they were no longer relevant. Action Items

- DBVI staff will transcribe critical priorities from flip charts transcribed and send out to the group.
- State Plan Committee designated to include Mr. Bailey and Ms. Bridges would comprise the SRC State Plan Committee.
- The SRC will develop data related and statistical questions for DBVI to be answered at the June meeting.

- Melanie Brunson made a motion to establish two work groups – one to work on Employment and one to work on Marketing and that committee members report back to this Council at the June meeting. The motion was seconded and approved. Ken Jessup volunteered to be the Communications person for Marketing Committee that will include Wanda Taylor and Judy Swystun. Rebecca Bridges offered to be the Communications person for the Employment group which will include Rick Gonzalez. Ken Jessup is the contact person for the Marketing group, including Wanda Taylor Judy Swystun. The committees will refine what their goals are and report on their work at the quarterly SRC meetings. DBVI will send out the list of Committee members. The Commissioner stated that e-mails will be used but please do not reply to “all” for e-mails. Rebecca Bridges, contact person for the Employment group, asked that when she and Ken Jessup send out e-mails for meeting dates, please reply to them individually.
- DARS Report: Ken Jessup reports that he went to the last DARS/SRC meeting and they are due to have another this Monday. He mentioned that at the last DARS meeting, there were only three committee members and the rest were DARS staff. The one-page minutes reported that he suggested they meet at Woodrow Wilson. The DARS SRC’s biggest complaint was that the government was not approving people for their SRC.

The Chair asked Ken to state what DARS stood for. It is Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. The Commissioner stated that each rehabilitative agency, by law must have a rehabilitative council. Ken Jessup represented this council at the DARS meeting.

The Commissioner’s Report

Commissioner Hopkins mentioned the bill that addressed reading the assessment of blind students was tabled in the Senate and the House. There is an issue concerning a perception that there is not adherence to the law that requires that Braille be taught to students with significant vision impairments unless there is an assessment conducted that indicates that another medium will be more appropriate. There is concern about the lack of Braille readers. Senator Pattie Murray was asked the US Dept of Education and specifically, the office of Special Education Programs, about their failure to hold state and local education authorities to the law where she felt that by their regulations and lack of enforcement, they undermined the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, and she wanted them to step up to the place. Subsequently, a letter was sent out to State Education Agencies reminding them of the requirements in IDEA. This year, one of the consumer organizations in the Commonwealth asked that reading media assessment be mandated. That did not happen but there is more focus on this. This Council is interacting with our Program Directors and talking about providing direct training to teachers of the vision impaired on Braille and a refresher to help promote the usage of Braille within the school divisions. John Eisenberg, VDOE, has been invited to speak on this issue at the upcoming Virginia Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Vision Impaired (AER) Conference. **The Virginia Registry for the Blind** that the Department has been required to maintain since 1950 was voted

out of existence by the General Assembly this year. The Governor has not yet acted on that. If the Governor signs the bill, there will no longer be a Register of the blind maintained by DBVI and the Agency will have to determine, through consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, if there are any other implications from the abolition of **The Registry for the Blind**. There were many blind individuals who did not like the idea of the government keeping their names on a list just by virtue of their being blind.

There was one other item not included in the Governor's budget. There was going to be a slight increase in money coming to the Department to support Radio Reading Service throughout the Commonwealth. The Senate passed an amendment. The House did not like it so the Radio Reading Service will not realize that modest increase. That was the only different thing included in our appropriations.

DBVI is in a state of flux as far as some of our administrative positions are concerned. Eva Ampey who directs our Administrative Services, is retiring therefore, we are recruiting for a Deputy Commissioner of Administration. DBVI is also in the mist of hiring a Budget Manager. DARS has been providing support for administrative services for the smaller disability agencies since the mid 90s. Last year, The Department of Planning and Budget agreed with the DBVI that this was not an idea set-up and that DBVI's budget functions should be done in-house and more closely aligned with our programs. By the time Council meets again, we will have a couple of new administrative staff members that will allow us to continue in our focus.

DBVI is doing some strategic planning to take a harder and more systematic approach to services at VRCBVI and customer expectations to make sure they are aligned. The Agency will be looking to an outside consultant to lead that effort. Additionally, DBVI is looking to contracting to do some management and leadership training. There are a couple of universities that are making proposals to DBVI. If DBVI funding permits, it we will initiate a training program. The Commissioner's goal is DBVI managers have the same baseline understanding of management and leadership.

Questions from the SRC

Judy Swystun asked "Does DBVI ever partner with VCU Graduate program and ask them do something for us for their thesis. DBVI partners with universities at the graduate/undergraduate levels. Recently, DBVI has partnered with the University of Richmond regarding Emergency Management of People with Disabilities. DBVI has an agreement with Virginia Commonwealth University to do internships with students, and sometimes the Agency hires students following their graduation.

New Business

There was no new business.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date is Saturday, June 14, 2014.

Deputy Commissioner's Report – Dr. Rick Mitchell

Regarding staffing, in DBVI's regional offices, a counselor in the Roanoke office retired and that position is in recruit. The DBVI is taking a more active approach to recruiting highly qualified staff by contacting colleges and universities throughout the country who offer Master's Degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling. There has been a vacancy in our Norfolk Office since last fall. Eleven interviews were conducted this past week. Our Fairfax office also has a vacancy for a Transition Counselor. Up to this point, the four VR Counselors in that office were sharing the transition responsibilities. There are 14 qualified applicants for the Transition Counselor to be interviewed.

The Deputy will visit the regional offices a couple of times a year and spend at least two days with them so as to have interaction with the staff, and answer their questions as a representative of headquarters. During Dr. Mitchell's round of visiting the offices last he found a lack of consistency in case documentation. Subsequently a new case review instrument has been developed. Already DBVI has received comments like there has been a "drastic improvement" in case documentation across the state. The Rehabilitation Teaching program, Education Services and Orientation and Mobility programs will also implement a new case file review instrument specific to those programs. T

Bristol will be conducting a transition program on March 8th; for five or six students and their families. Melanie Roane, Director of our Rehab Center and Brooke Rogers, the Assistant Director of the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) are participating in this program. DBVI is looking at ways to increase the number of high school students coming to the VRCBVI, especially for the college prep program. The Bristol program is marketing VRCBVI Transition programs this weekend and the agency is seeking opportunities to have counselors and other staff from the VRCBVI meet with students during their senior year to talk about services the Center offers so that more students will be coming through the college prep program; thereby being better prepared when they go to college, having the necessary blindness skills, assistive technology skills, so that when they actually start into college, they will be better prepared.

Regarding training of managers and supervisors, DBVI is collaborating with the Center at GWU to provide training to the regional managers and program directors the first week in June for three days, here at DBVI. Training will include basic supervision of rehabilitation professionals as well as basic ethic issues related to management and decision making; a baseline of good managerial skills. This training will be provided through DBVI's relationship with the Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Center. George Washington University is the Region 3 TACE which includes VA, WV, MD, DE, PA and DC, and they specifically work with state rehabilitation programs and their partners on how to improve practice; the leadership capability of all of our managers across the board.

Success employment outcomes for the first quarter are in track with trends from previous years.

Questions from the SRC

“How many cases do you have open at any one time? Are closures 50% of all your cases, 90%? Do you track that? Do you see what I’m asking? For instance, if you were at 50% you would want to get to 60%. If you were at 90% that would be pretty good.”

Agency Response - At any given time, over the last several years, DBVI has served 1200-1400 people in the VR. That includes everybody , regardless of where they are VR process, including referrals, those developing their educational goals, those actively receiving services, those who are ready to go to work, those who are working, including those of transition age whose cases may be open for many years.

Questions from the SRC

“Do we feel we are doing a good job in that area? Do we need to improve? Where are we?”

Agency Response:

In 2012, 156 individuals went to work; DBVI determined that was unacceptable. In 2013, 195 individuals went to work The Deputy Commissioner has set a goal of 200 to 250 closures, which means the agency will have to have increased the number of referrals to have more people coming out. DBVI is making concerted efforts to market by identifying target groups such as eye doctors. Some staff members have gotten creative and gone into venues such as Wal-Mart, putting up agency brochures so that the public will know more about DBVI services. The agency will be examining past records to explore cases of individuals who were unsuccessful in accomplishing their vocational goals and begin determining how the agency can improve services so those individuals go to work. DBVI has also implemented a work group called “Pathways to Progress;” a brainstorming group to assist staff when they feel they are out of options to offer additional ideas and suggestions.

Commissioner Hopkins emphasized that with DBVI closures, what is most important is the number of those individuals who go to work.

VR Program Update and Agency Report – Susan Payne

There is a correction to the VR report in that I inadvertently added the current outcomes but failed to delete the outcomes from the previous quarter. So there were two different sets of outcomes.

As outlined in our State Plan, DBVI has accomplished the goal of having transition counselors in each of the regional offices. Bristol’s is today. Norfolk conducts a program every year. Bristol is doing one this year as well as other offices. This summer, for the second year, on June 23-25, 2014, DBVI will be conducting a summer field transition programs that will be held over at VRCBVI. This year, it is a collaborative program, with VRCBVI staff and field staff are working together to provide students with a shorter term transition program. The agency requests that the SRC network with students with open cases, who have already been determined eligible for services. Students on DBVI’s existing case loads

will be receiving a letter telling them and their parents about the program, and then they can apply for or access the program through their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The individuals developing and implementing the program include the current transition counselors, representatives from the Orientation Mobility program, Rehabilitation Teaching and Independent Living programs. One of the regional managers from our Fairfax Office and one of our administrative counselors from VRCBVI are co-directing this activity.

More information will be provided at the June meeting regarding the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The SRC will be a part of the CSNA process, as federally mandated. The Chair, Vice-Chair and Ex-Chair will be involved with review of surveys, looking at methods and techniques. The Council may want to discuss if they want to conduct the survey in a three-year cycle or contract with a college or university that has the resources to conduct that level of research. The Commissioner stated that it would be more advantageous to contract with a credible source that can conduct the survey.

Questions from the SRC

When are we scheduled for our next monitoring?

Agency Response

In 2016. The Commissioner mentioned that the agency is already doing a self assessment in preparation for monitoring by the Rehabilitation Services Administrator (RSA). The bulk of the work is done before RSA comes on site. DBVI will spend all of 2015 putting itself in position for RSA to come in 2016.

The Commissioner announced that DBVI will be heading a Transition Summit. Nicole Jeffords and her peers will be involved in the summit. They will spend time discussing what DBVI does, and best practices to ensure that our transition procedures are consistent statewide.

DBVI is conducting a statewide Staff Meeting coming up in May; the Board and Council are invited.

New Member Orientation for the SRC is scheduled for Friday, June 13, 2014. DBVI will have an opportunity to conduct a tour of LRC, VRCBVI, the Richmond Regional Office and the computer lab. DBVI will send the e-Rehab site about the responsibilities of the State Rehab Council. All members of the SRC are invited to attend the New Member Orientation.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ramona L. Miller
Administrative Assistant, DBVI, SRC