

MINUTES
DBVI REHABILITATION COUNCIL
Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Headquarters Building
397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA
March 19, 2016

SRC Attendees

Christine Appert, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Rebecca Bridges, Vice-Chair, SRC, represents Business, Industry and Labor; Linda Broady-Meyers, Richmond, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Wanda Council, Newport News, VA, represents the Virginia Department of Education; Nicole Drummond, Falls Church, represents Virginia's Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center; Justin Graves, Fredericksburg, represents Business, Industry and Labor; Ken Jessup, Virginia Beach, represents Disability Advocacy Group; Ray Hopkins, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Jeanette McAllister, Franklin, represents Disability Advocacy Group; Jill Nerby, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Kim Shick, Winchester, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Shelesha Taylor, Richmond, represents the federally mandated Client Assistance Program (CAP); Valerie Walker, Newport News, represents Business, Industry and Labor.

Members Absent

Jeanne Armentrout, Roanoke, represents the Virginia Workforce Council; Isaac Crisp, VR Counselor, Richmond Regional Office, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Judy Swystun, Hampton Roads, represents Community Rehabilitation Services Program.

Members of the Public

Marie Brinas, Old Dominion Council.

DBVI Staff to the SRC

Jessica Collette, Executive Assistant, DBVI; Rick Mitchell, SRC Liaison, Deputy Commissioner of Services, DBVI.

Welcome and Introductions

Chairwoman Bridges called the meeting to order. Members introduced themselves.

Adoption of Agenda

Ms. Nerby moved to adopt agenda; Mr. Jessup seconded and motion passed unanimously.

Approval of December 2015 Meeting Minutes

Ms. Nerby moved to approve the December 2015 meeting minutes; Ms. Appert seconded and the motion passed

unanimously.

Public Comment

Ms. Marie Brinas commented on HB 166: Literacy Assessment for Blind Bill that was presented to the General Assembly this legislative session. Delegate David Bulova was initially in favor of the assessment, but members from multiple special interest groups spoke with him about this legislation.

Commissioner's Report – *Ray Hopkins*

Thanked members for attending. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner Mitchell attended the Virginia Board of Workforce Development on Friday, March 18th, where the Board approved the Combined State Plan as submitted and submitted to the Governor for approval. The workgroup tasked with creating the Combined State Plan received around 150 comments from the public. A few comments pertained to DBVI, but nothing substantial that would alter the plan. Once approved, Virginia will be entitled to receive federal funds due to the plan being in place by April 1st. The specific regulations of WIOA will be released this summer, but states will receive little to no guidance by the Federal Government before those regulations are released.

The General Assembly Session just concluded and even though DBVI did not put forth any agency bills, it was still an interesting session. DBVI sees the need to bring the community together for education of students who are blind or vision impaired. This would include many partners such as the Virginia Department of Education, the National Federation for the Blind, the Old Dominion Council, the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and other professionals. In the past years, DBVI has worked with the VDOE on training for teachers and others to have education in braille instruction.

Deputy Commissioner's Report – *Rick L. Mitchell*

All DBVI regional offices are all well-staffed. All Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor positions are filled throughout the Commonwealth. DBVI currently has two Education Coordinator positions open. These positions are in the Roanoke and Fairfax offices. A Special Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner for Services, Doug James, has begun working part-time with DBVI to work on special projects, such as the Policy and Procedure Manual. He is also working with the Workforce Unit and helping to assemble the Workforce Program. A meeting is scheduled for next week to begin creating a Workforce Development Strategic Plan. DBVI has hired the Careers Pathway Project Coordinator since the Agency Report was released to the SRC. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VRCBVI) is still actively recruiting for an O&M Instructor and a Vocational Evaluator.

The Roanoke Regional Office experienced a fire in June and the Office was expected to return in February; however, the building did not meet the ADA requirements and had roofing issues. DBVI broke the lease and are actively looking for new facility to relocate. Even with the hardships of office space, the staff have not had any issues with direct client services. Ms. Shick echoed that and her appreciation of their hard work and dedication.

VR Program Update – *Rick L. Mitchell*

The VR Director position has closed with a very strong pool of applicants. The first round of interviews will more than likely be via telephone due to applicants being from out of state. As a reminder, this position has been closed three previous times, offered twice and accepted, but then the applicant had to remove their acceptance.

The Workforce Development Unit is focused on paid internships and are working with two staffing agencies that will hire consumers and process paperwork to remove the hardship from the employer. Workers are required to be at least 18 for paid internships and consumers under 18 years old can participate in an unpaid work experience. Informational interviewing has been leading to paid or unpaid work experience.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) for Transition Services is in Procurement currently and will go out across the Commonwealth for employers to bid on single or multiple services to provide pre-employment services.

Within the Transition Program a Strategic Plan is being finalized and will then be presented to the Commissioner. This plan is expected to be finished by the end of next week. A major component of the plan is strong communication of partners involved with student and pre-employment services.

DBVI will begin working to post ALL strategic plans together. Dr. Mitchell, Doug James and Cindy Roberts met with the DARS Workforce Leadership on a structured collaboration between DARS and DBVI.

Work Group Reports

Legislative Work Group Report – Ken Jessup

No recent meetings.

Marketing Work Group Report – Kim Shick

Ms. Shick shared about the efforts of DBVI through marketing. Currently, DBVI is running NPR ads statewide on several different service areas and workforce development. The Facebook page has continued to grow and members appreciated the posts and the descriptive photos that are shared. During the last meeting, attendees questioned the best format for Agency literature and seemed to conclude that providing thumb drives with DBVI information included could be most beneficial.

Employment Work Group Report – Rebecca Bridges

Chairwoman Bridges updated the Council of how the Employment Work Group met in the early part of February and brainstormed how to help consumers find jobs. Since the creation of the Workforce Unit, they have begun focusing on paid and unpaid work experience and working with consumers to find employment. DBVI has been doing a great job with this and marketing and it allows for the SRC to look at dissolving these work groups. Chairwoman Bridges will email questions from the February meeting to Dr. Mitchell for a possible working lunch in the future. Dr. Mitchell mentioned the move toward credential training instead of college. He used the following numbers:

- For every one job requiring a Master's degree, there are,
- Two jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree, and,
- Seven jobs requiring Specific Credentialing.

SRC Member Spotlight – Shelesha Taylor

Each meeting a specific member will be asked by the Chairwoman to share about themselves. This quarter, Ms. Shelesha Taylor shared about herself. Initially from Brooklyn, NY, she relocated to Virginia around age 10 after being diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) at age 8. She is currently married and is the mother of two

daughters. She works as a Disability Rights Advocate at the Disability Law Center of Virginia with her niche being in Title I in ADA. She works to inform Virginians with disabilities of employment accommodations through Title I. Since both daughters are active athletics, she is a passionate soccer mom and stays active between sports. She demonstrates a love for learning and is currently enrolled in an ADA course at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

Working Lunch- VRCBVI Strategic Plan – *Melody Roane, VRCBVI Director*

Ms. Roane gave the history of the VRCBVI Learning Collaborative. This plan has been two years in the making with an employment focus through the Strategic Plan. The team tasked with this plan interviewed 19 other Rehabilitation Centers from around the country. Once interviews were completed, the team selected three to do on-site visits. In NE the focus was examining programs working with youth; in Texas, which is working with the same consultant, there was an employment focus and in New Jersey the focus was on work experience for all students. From their findings, all of the Centers are dealing with the same issues experienced at VRCBVI. VRCBVI is working for the capability to create a model for other states to learn from.

The mission of VRCBVI is to prepare blind, vision impaired, or deaf-blind Virginians for their desired level of employment and personal independence through the integration of individualized comprehensive blindness skills, work skills and experiences.

Ms. Roane reviewed information and strategies that are mentioned in the Strategic Plan and are being implemented to ensure VRCBVI will move forward. Ms. Shick gave accolades for creating this strategic plan and expressed appreciation of how this will benefit current and future students.

Old and/or New Business – *Rebecca Bridges*

SRC Retreat Recap – *Jeanette McAllister & Rebecca Bridges*

To kick off the SRC Retreat, Dr. Fred Schroder spoke about WIOA and the history of rehabilitation. Ms. Susan Payne informed the SRC of FIOA regulations. Chairwoman Bridges reminded members to not “Reply All” to emails about official business. Information was also provided about work groups and required procedures, such as a meeting notice being available within three business days on multiple platforms and the requirement of having a quorum in one physical place. During the afternoon, the SRC participated in team building activities, including DBVI trivia.

Establish Annual Report Committee – **Action Item**

The SRC Annual Report is due to the Secretary’s Office & RSA in December. In the past DBVI has taken the largest portion of work, but beginning now this will be created by the SRC with input from DBVI. Ms. Broady-Meyers and Ms. Appert will work together on this project. Chairwoman Bridges will send a copy of the DRS Annual Report to the Council. Ms. Broady-Meyers will serve as Point of Contact.

New Member Orientation Planning – **Action Item**

Chairwoman Bridges offered to revisit the New Member Packet. Ms. Drummond will review the information and create ways to be more user-friendly. The Commissioner questioned if there are any members who have not received a formal Orientation. Ms. Drummond is currently is the only member who has not completed Orientation. She will review materials and be prepared for discussion during the June meeting.

Existing Council Vacancies – Jessica Collette

Ms. Collette reviewed the four current vacancies. Members questioned how the member positions were chosen. No direct answer given. Members also questioned if someone outside of the given categories could serve. The Commissioner stated the federal law requires members to serve in a specific capacity, but there is only a minimum of what needs to be represented. To have representation in other forms, legal interpretation would need to be sought.

New Business

Chairwoman Bridges proposed to disseminate all current committees: Legislative, Marketing and Employment. As of March 19, 2016, these committees are expired.

Due to the FOIA discussion, the SRC will need to review content of the SRC Bylaws and make any necessary edits. Mr. Jessup and Chairwoman Bridges will review and make suggested changes. These will be presented to the Council in the June meeting.

The Commissioner offered for any member who is in the Richmond area to reach out for a tour of the Richmond Campus or to receive more information about specific services. Also, as they are around the Commonwealth and would like to see a regional office or a VIB location, DBVI would be happy to set up a meeting for members to learn more. SRC Members are to email Ms. Collette and cc Chairwoman Bridges if interested.

The SRC would like legal interpretation on remote attendance for members. When are members allowed to connect remotely, vote remotely, or what constitutes emergency remote connection? The Commissioner mentioned that on emergency cases, remote access is allowed; members with a disability that presents a hardship to attend a meeting, could be further addressed in the bylaws due to the fact the law does not give a specific number of times this can be exercised. The Commissioner suggested seeking legal counsel to receive interpretation if a person has a hardship with transportation due to disability is covered under the option of remote connection. The SRC would like clarification; DBVI will contact the Attorney General's Office.

Members requested to have their current term number be included on the SRC roster. Ms. Collette will add the requested information.

Date for next meeting – June 11, 2016

Adjournment

Ms. Broady-Meyers moved to adjourn; Ms. Shick seconded and motion passed unanimously.