

**VIRGINIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES for 9/19/07**

Members Attending:

Chet Avery, Chair
Pat Beattie
Tom Dowling
John Eisenburg
Peggy Fields
Elizabeth Flaherty
Joe Foresta
Linda Harris
George Scott Higdon
Sam Simon
Brenda Wickard

Celestine Walker – by conference phone

Absent Members:

Ben Garrett
Doug James
Senator Yvonne Miller
Doug Owens
Ricky Palmateer

Guests:

Christina Delzigaro, Goodwill of Central Virginia
Charles Layman, Goodwill of Central Virginia
David Nelson, Goodwill of Central Virginia
Robin Ramsey, Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment
Stephanie Williams, Goodwill of Central Virginia

DRS/VATS Staff

Jim Rothrock, Commissioner, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)
Dr. Joe Ashley, Deputy Commissioner, DRS, Grants and Special Program, Director
Ken Knorr, Director, VATS
Bob Krollman, VATS
Jane Lively, VATS
Elin Glass, VATS
Janice Austin, VATS

The Virginia Assistive Technology System's (VATS) Advisory Council held its quarterly meeting September 19, 2007, at Goodwill of Central Virginia, Board Room, 6301 Midlothian Turnpike, Richmond, Virginia.

Welcome and Introductions:

Chet Avery, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:15AM. He welcomed members and guests to the meeting and invited Dr. Joe Ashley, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), for opening comments.

Dr. Ashley stated that he is excited about the Virginia Assistive Technology Device Reutilization Network (VATNet) grant. It will benefit the Commonwealth to help people become more independent. This is an important step and a place to for the Council to remain focused.

Dr. Ashley stated that Bob Krollman, VATS, is working on several projects. A two-&-one-half-day training is scheduled for October 2007 to help VR counselors train consumers for employment. Vendor training on AT and the universal design for work settings is being planned. In order to speed up loaner equipment (computers and software) for VR consumers, Mr. Krollman is working with creating loaner libraries.

In Newport News the Workforce Investment Council is looking forward to adding universal design on the web as a business service. Mr. Krollman is working on an event is planned that will be held in October. Jim Mueller, Universal Design Engineer will be the featured speaker.

Housekeeping

Chet Avery requested a reminder be sent to Council members to use the electronic check deposit for reimbursement of travel expenses.

Approval of June 6, 2007, Meeting Minutes:

Minutes of the June 6, 2007, Council Meeting was approved as written.

Public Comment:

No public comment was made.

Update on VATS Activities:

Ken Knorr, Director of VATS, updated the Council on the VATNet program. Mr. Knorr recognized the accomplishments of Goodwill of Central Virginia and The Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (FREE) in Roanoke. Goodwill has been working with the Virginia Beach area and they are ready for an open-house to be held on October 17, 2007. Goodwill has already established a satellite recycling program in Petersburg.

Robin Ramsey, Executive Director of FREE, stated that another recycling initiative is opening for business October. Giles Memorial Hospital in the New River Valley area is hosting the program. Also, after two years of working with the Fairfax area, the recycling group is ready to start recycling. They will focus on AT for children. They have received donated storage space and are receiving donations. They have received a grant from a local foundation.

Mr. Knorr stated that an A.T. Summit is planned for March 2008 at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville, VA. The summit will include a description of the recycling process and an opportunity for communities to meet together to begin planning for recycling programs in their areas. Linda Harris asked how Council could help with the upcoming A.T. Summit. Mr. Knorr suggested that council members help identify community leaders who could help with recycling program development.

Linda Harris inquired if there are any partnerships with the Veterans Association. Virginia is expecting 150,000 veterans who will need assistive technology services. Most returning veterans have closed head injuries. The federal government has recently encouraged states to train veterans in their homes when possible. Independent Living Centers in Virginia have been notified about the recycling program needs in the state.

Ms. Lively commented that the Veterans Administration hospitals have not been responsive to calls from VATS. Scott Higdon stated that he had connections at the V.A. and could possibly open some doors to help with the recycling of medical equipment. Linda Harris will meet with counselors at the community college in Tidewater who will be seeing many of the disabled veterans. She will follow up with information that may be useful at the A.T. Summit.

Ms. Lively reported that she is working with the Department of Emergency Management to develop a connection with them and the recycling programs. Plans are being made to set aside equipment, for emergency workers to use to replace assistive technology lost during an emergency situation. Sam Simon is working with the World Institute on Disabilities who are working to make emergency shelters accessible. David Nelson has met with emergency planners in Chesterfield County. The County is working with the Red Cross and still has emergency planning issues to resolve.

Ken Knorr informed the Council that the State Plan for VATS had been completed and is in compliance with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) requirements. The purpose of the report was to assure RSA that VATS was doing what is required under the AT Act. VATS anticipates \$380,000 next year for program operation. The State will provide \$124,000 which will be used to fund the VATS Regional Sites. The VATNet grant will provide \$180,000 per yr for the next two years to support developing of the recycling network.

Jane Lively reported that RSA is preparing a program review to determine each of the AT programs' compliance with the AT Act. Components of the review have been posted online for review and comment by the AT Programs. The process has 3 stages: first programs will be required to submit prescribed materials for review. RSA with a team of peer reviewers will review the materials submitted from each state and will additionally review selected programs and provide feedback with recommendations to RSA. The final step will be an onsite review.

The review process is still in draft form. Council members will participate at some point in the process. Scott Higdon and Linda Harris volunteered to work with Ms. Lively and RSA to meet requirements.

Tour of Goodwill of Central Virginia's Recycling Program

David Nelson and Christian Delzingaro provided a tour of the medical equipment facility at Goodwill of Central Virginia. The Goodwill recycling facility is a model for other recycling programs.

Commissioner's Comments

Jim Rothrock, DRS Commissioner joined the Council for lunch. He discussed State financial reductions and a 5% cut in some programs. VATS will not be affected. The Consumer Service Fund is a fund of last resort for assistive technologies. This fund may be reduced. The recycling programs may become a primary resource for applicants to the Consumer Services Fund. Mr. Rothrock is excited about the progress of the VATS staff and their success in working with the recycling grant. The VATNet project is considered a national model.

Member Activities

Tom Dowling expressed concern about Virginia's response to the needs of the veterans. With closed head injuries deafness is also probable. Mr. Rothrock said that the majority of the veterans are still attached to the military and DRS has not received many referrals. Mr. Dowling reported that he had attended a convention and Town Hall meeting in July in Williamsburg. Important feedback from the Town Hall meeting was that interpreter services at medical facilities is a critical need. Mr. Dowling also attended a convention in California on Telecommunication for the Deaf.

Ken Knorr recognized and thanked Chet Avery, as Chair of the Council, for all of his fine support and service. Mr. Avery's term on the Council has been completed as required in the Council by-laws and Chet will be missed.

Dr. Joe Ashley and Ken will be in touch with Council members to participate in a process to determine the future of VATS. Two key VATS staff are retiring within the next six months, thereby providing the opportunity to consider alternative ways of providing AT services. The group will meet in November to develop and assess a variety of alternatives.

Mr. Sam Simon is the new representative from the State Rehabilitation Council. Mr. Simon lives in the DC area. He is on the Board of the World Institute on Disabilities. His interests are assistive technology and accessibility.

Brenda Wickard stated the disAbility Resource Center (dRC) is reaching out to the community to share information about their medical equipment recycling program. They held a very successful open house on July 20, 2007. Jeremy Buzzell, RSA, John Hager, Republican Party Chair, and Mr. Rothrock were present for the event.

Peggy Fields, Department for Blind and Visual Impairments (DBVI), is working with a group who is planning for services for returning veterans. They need people to train veterans on the use of their assistive technology. DBVI has added information on their web site and the rehabilitation engineers are focusing on this issue. DBVI is also working with the One-Stop Career Centers. Pat Beattie stated that training in other areas of the state, other than Richmond, is on the table for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind. On the horizon is Vista Operating Systems and training will be needed to use the system. Technical access will be critical for the blind community.

Dr. Ashley stated that DRS and DBVI have been working with the Virginia Employment Commission to help make jobs available to the blind and vision impaired. This process is moving forward.

Linda Harris reported that the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority plans to increase visibility, have a name change and let people know what the program has to offer. The program also includes the Consumer Service Fund which may have a reduction in funding which is considered the fund of last resort. Ms. Harris has been involved in the "Say Yes to College", a two-day program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities in the Tidewater area. This informs students who plan to go to college what to expect and a tour of Tidewater Community College and Old Dominion University is included. This program builds confidence in students with disabilities as they consider planning their future schooling.

John Eisenburg reported that the Department of Education has completed an Action Plan on AT and has statewide conferences planned. Those developing Individual Education Plan's (IEP's) will have extra tools to use when considering assistive technology. A program to convert text books into alternative formats for the schools is housed at George Mason University. New equipment is being purchased, such as a robotic page-turner. They have a contract with DBVI to convert material into Braille. Electronic text will be available with instant conversion to meet the student's need.

Joe Foresta stated that he has more flexibility and time available to assist with various activities mentioned above. He expressed interest working with Goodwill and DBVI.

Celestine Walker reported that the recycling program in the Lynchburg area is moving along as planned. Ms Walker is currently working with City government, advocating for audio traffic signals to meet the needs of people with vision impairments.

Elizabeth Flaherty reported that she has been working on Medicaid policy changes and updates. With regard to recycling of Medicaid purchased assistive technology, she stated that once equipment is purchased through Medicaid, it becomes the property of the individual. She is trying to get the word out about medical equipment recycling so individuals are aware that they can donate used equipment to the recycling programs when they no longer need it and has included this information in her report to the Secretary of Health and Human Resources. She will be happy to pass along in reports information that would be helpful to support the recycling programs.

New Business

A new slate of officers were nominated and approved by the Council to become effective October 1, 2007. As stated in the by-laws, the Vice Chair will become the next Chair of the Council. Scott Higdon, current Vice Chair, has agreed to serve as the new Chair. John Eisenburg will be the new Vice Chair and Celestine Walker has agreed to continue as Secretary.

Next Meeting/Adjournment

The next meeting will be held Wednesday, December 5, 2007, at the new Goodwill recycling facility in Virginia Beach to include a tour of the facility. David Nelson, the manager of the recycling program at Central Virginia Goodwill will make the necessary arrangements.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.