

**Final Minutes**  
**DBVI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL RETREAT**  
**VA Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired**  
**Library & Resource Center**  
**397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA**  
**March 13, 2015**

**SRC Attendees**

Jeanne Armentrout, Roanoke, represents the Virginia Workforce Council; John Bailey, Fairfax, Chairman SRC, represents Business, Industry and Labor; 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; Isaac Crisp, VR Counselor, Richmond Regional Office, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Nicole Drummond, Falls Church, represents Virginia's Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center; Chris Grandle, Stuarts Draft, represents the Statewide Independent Living Council; Ray Hopkins, Richmond, Commissioner, DBVI, Ex-Officio Member; Elizabeth Horn, Richmond, represents the federally mandated Client Assistance Program (CAP); Ken Jessup, Virginia Beach, represents Disability Advocacy Group; Judy Swystun, Hampton Roads, represents Community Rehabilitation Services Program; Valerie Walker, Newport News, represents Business, Industry and Labor; Kim Shick, Winchester, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

**Members Absent**

Christine Appert, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Justin Graves, Fredericksburg, represents Business, Industry and Labor; Jeanette McAllister, Franklin, represents Disability Advocacy Group; Jill Nerby, Charlottesville, Former Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

**Members of the Public**

Patricia Mitchell, Winchester, Ms. Shick's assistant.

**DBVI Staff to the SRC**

Susan Davis Payne, Policy and Training Coordinator, Staff Liaison to SRC; Jessica Collette, Executive Assistant, DBVI.

**Welcome and Introductions**

John Bailey, Chair, welcomed all members and explained all council seats are occupied, except one which is for a representative of an individual who is blind, has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty or is unable to represent him or herself or is unable due to those disabilities.

Members introduced themselves and their role on the Council.

**Roles and Responsibilities of SRC Members- John Bailey**

Due to many new appointees, the Chair took time to explain the role of the State Rehabilitation Council. He clarified that the SRC is an advisory council, not a Board. By this, the Council makes suggestions or recommendations to the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Those recommendations are

designed to help DBVI reach its goals. On the Council, there is diversity that adds value to the recommendations given to the Agency. The Chair suggested that each member use their personal passions to help incorporate those into the recommendations given to DBVI.

Susan Payne, SRC liaison, discussed some of the challenges facing individuals who are blind, as well as, the Agency. She clarified that DBVI obtains information from multiple sources including public meetings, consumer satisfaction surveys, and the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, to receive information about the challenges. The biggest challenge facing individuals who are blind or vision impaired seems to be transportation. Next, credentials needed to enter or succeed in the workforce may create a challenge for blind individuals; and lastly, housing.

How do these challenges affect the Agency? The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has always focused on work and allowing individuals to enter and succeed in the workforce. With the passage of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) more emphasis is placed on youth with disabilities obtaining the needed skills to enter the workforce. Agencies are charged with spending 15% of grant funds on pre-employment services for students in transition. Also, 50% is required to fund Supported Employment. Next, the Agency is challenged to increase the skill set of current staff to be able to interact more effectively with businesses and create or strengthen those relationships. Final regulations guiding the implementation of WIOA have not yet been released. The Agency is currently operating by examining each program to ensure compliance with WIOA even without the regulations. There are currently approximately one hundred new requirements, including VR agencies not being required to submit a state plan until March 16, based on this new Act. WIOA mandates unified or combined state plans and DBVI will be collaborating with other state workforce programs to submit that plan in the future.

The Agency is currently faced with the task of establishing a strong reputation within the business world. Another challenge is ensuring that existing staff have the skills and expertise work with younger clients who are more tech savvy. The Agency is encouraging and offering the training needed for staff to become stronger in these areas.

The Chair discussed a few frequently asked questions posed concerning the SRC. The Council appointments are based on the fiscal year, October to September. Also, the Council offers three elected officer positions; Chair, Vice-Chair, and Former Chair. To be qualified for one of these positions, the member must sit on the council for at least one year. Elections are held in September for these three elected positions. There are additional opportunities for members to participate in a greater capacity by sitting on a committee. There is currently a Marketing Committee and an Employment Committee.

The Council conducts four meetings a year along with an annual, one-day retreat. Attendance is important for these five meetings. Stated within the Bylaws, a member is not allowed to be absent for two meetings in a row. Proxies are appropriate if an extenuating situation occurs. The Chair pointed new members to the Bylaws where many answers to their questions will be stated. Discussion continued about meeting participation and regulations.

### **Icebreaker Activity- Rebecca Bridges**

Members were asked to answer what was their first job and what was the first album ever bought.

### **Working Lunch: Review of current DBVI marketing efforts and activities- Barbara McCarthy**

Ms. McCarthy provided the Council with a presentation of marketing items used by DBVI. Currently, the

Agency utilizes many items including, umbrellas with the Agency logo, DBVI flash drives, and vision simulators that allow users to experience different vision impairments. Also, each regional office has banner displays and tablecloths with the Agency logo, and brochures to be used at different events. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired has created a short promotional video for their summer LIFE program.

DBVI VR counselors are required to complete outreach activities for four hours a week. Examples of these events would include, health fairs, disability awareness fairs, and conferences at a local level. Also, staffers will leave information at optometrist or doctor offices.

Ms. Judy Swystun questioned how the Agency is reaching out through the school systems to the parents of the blind. The Agency has several Transition Counselors that work with children beginning around the age of 14. DBVI and the Department of Education (DOE) work closely for educational success. Each student has an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that allows youth to begin their transition goals around 14.

Ms. Swystun suggested marketing for volunteers for the Agency to help advance its goals.

Ms. Kim Shick passed along her thankfulness of the Library and Resource Center staff and the value it is to blind persons throughout the Commonwealth.

#### **2014 State Plan Recap: *Review of recommendations and DBVI's progress- John Bailey & Susan Payne***

Ms. Payne took time to review the suggestions the SRC members made for the 2014 State Plan. She then reviewed the response from the Agency and the progress of each item.

Ms. Payne, also, informed the Council that the Agency does not have to submit a state plan in 2015. According to new regulations, a combined or unified State Plan between the departments of Labor, Education, Commerce, Community College system, DARS, DBVI, and other agencies that have statewide workforce development responsibilities, will be due in March 2016.

Below are the recommendations the Council made (italicized) and the Agency's response:

1. *The SRC continues to recommend DBVI remain focused on 6 priorities: increasing competitive employment outcomes and ensuring high consumer wages in integrated work settings; passing the annual Standards and Performance Indicators evaluation; consistently achieving a high level of consumer satisfaction on choice, needs, and good service delivery; providing rehabilitation technology to consumers to facilitate their success in training and employment; expanding transition services for secondary school students seeking employment and/or post-secondary training; and increasing public awareness of services for the blind in Virginia.*

The Agency agreed and accepted these priorities.

2. *The rehabilitation community recognizes that a key factor in successful employment outcomes depend greatly on the active participation of the individuals in their rehabilitation program. In order to achieve full participation, individuals must be educated on their rights and responsibilities as recipients of rehabilitation services before embarking on a program. Therefore, SRC recommends that DBVI develop a document to be provided to all perspective consumers of services which outline individuals' rights and responsibilities and the ways they can and should actively participate in their rehabilitation program. If such documentation already exists, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide it to the Council for review*

*and comment at the first SRC meeting in FY2015.*

DBVI provides individuals who are applying for or receiving services with information regarding their rights and responsibilities at four junctures: Application, Eligibility Determination (order of selection category determination), Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), and at Closure. The Council concluded they would like to see the documents that include the Rights and Responsibilities.

3. *Informed choice is an area of concern for the SRC and other stakeholders. SRC members, and individuals making public comment, indicated DBVI should ensure applicants and recipients of services are informed and guided by DBVI staff about their rights to make informed choices and given sufficient information about options available to them in order to facilitate informed choice regarding their vocational goals and the goods and services they are eligible to receive to accomplish those goals.*

The VR Policy Manual was revised to include Informed Choice and Consumer Rights. Clients are not complaining about not receiving information about their rights. Mr. Crisp, VR counselor for DBVI, commented his experience was that clients are on “information overload” when explaining the Rights & Responsibilities.

4. *The SRC recommends the following related to consumer satisfaction data.*
  - a. *Consumer Satisfaction survey data is collected annually or on a rolling basis.*
  - b. *The SRC also recommends that DBVI establish a quarterly reporting cycle whereby consumer satisfaction data and analysis is provided to the SRC at each scheduled meeting (a minimum of four times each year).*
  - c. *That DBVI ensure that its existing data collection, storage, and security mechanisms and policies are written such that no one person has sole access to this data, and provide this documentation to the SRC for review and comment.*
  - d. *That DBVI work collaboratively with the SRC on the development and administration of the CSNA in 2015.*

DBVI has accomplished tasks associated with this recommendation. Ms. Shick raised the question if VR/DBVI clients are given satisfaction surveys, both successful and unsuccessful closures. Ms. Payne was not sure of the answer, but understood how it would be beneficial to receive feedback from both groups.

5. *Since 2009, the SRC and DBVI Liaison have been providing new SRC members with an orientation. Since 2011, the SRC has conducted an annual Retreat to identify projects and focus areas, and develop action steps to accomplish these objectives. Both of these activities have proven useful for the effective operation of the SRC. Therefore, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide continued support for these two activities to include: participation in New Member Orientation, and the provision of a dedicated staff member whose sole responsibility is to capture notes and key action items from the Annual Retreat for distribution to the SRC no later than two weeks following the event.*

DBVI will continue to collaborate with the SRC to provide an orientation to new SRC members and to facilitate the conduct of an annual Retreat based on available funding to sponsor such an event. During the Orientation, members will learn the background of the VR Program and the Council, its role and responsibilities, as well as, receiving tours of the Richmond Virginia Industries of the Blind (VIB), Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and the Library and Resource Center.

- 6. The SRC recommends DBVI continue steps in 2015 to recruit and hire qualified individuals who are blind or vision impaired; make job position announcements available to consumer groups; and, develop other strategies to recruit qualified blind individuals. The SRC recommends that DBVI report on their progress in their efforts at each scheduled SRC meeting (a minimum of four times each year).*

DBVI continues to hire blind personnel. Job announcements will continue to be emailed to SRC members. Announcements can also be located on the Virginia Human Resource management website.

- 7. The SRC recommends DBVI continue in FY 2015 to conduct regional public meetings with regional or state meetings of consumer organizations. It is recommended that the public comments and agency responses from those meetings continue to be shared with the SRC at each scheduled SRC meeting. Also, it is recommended the information be posted on the DBVI website and the designated channel for Virginia on Newsline.*

DBVI conducted four public meetings Fall 2014. DBVI, also conducts a public meeting in association with VR CBVI to provide opportunities for students to make comments. The agency prepares a summary of comments and agency responses which are posted online.

- 8. The SRC recommends that DBVI make job development, job placement, job coaching training to counselors a very high priority for 2015, and include mentoring as one of the training strategies. The SRC recommends that DBVI report on these efforts at each scheduled SRC meeting (a minimum of four times each year).*

DBVI provided all VR staff with Employment Outcomes Training (EOT) that involved conferences in November, December and January. Also, VR staff are provided with monthly training using a video teleconferencing format; the training is entitled, Making a Difference in People's Life's (MAD). **Council members agreed for Mr. Crisp to speak about the EOT conferences for a working lunch at the next meeting.**

- 9. The SRC recommends that DBVI review their current strategies for conducting marketing and outreach to individuals and potential consumers, and present them to the SRC at their first scheduled meeting of FFY 2015. Following this meeting, it is recommended that DBVI work collaboratively with the SRC to incorporate both new and existing marketing and outreach strategies and activities into a marketing plan that includes goals, target audiences, and milestones. The SRC recommends that the marketing plan be presented to the Council for their education and advice in early FFY 2015. The SRC also recommends they be kept apprised of the implementation and results of the marketing plan.*

DBVI will update SRC members quarterly about the steps that are being taken for marketing. There is not a Marketing plan yet, as the Agency does not have the personnel.

- 10. Consumer satisfaction results in other states support the SRC's belief that more face-to-face time spent by VR counselors with their clients will improve the quality of services, as well as consumer satisfaction. Since DBVI does not currently keep statistics on administrative versus client interaction percentages, the SRC recommends that DBVI develop a mechanism for tracking and reporting on the percentage of time VR counselors spend on administrative versus client interaction activities on a monthly basis. The SRC recommends that DBVI present their proposed tracking mechanism to the SRC at its second quarterly meeting in FY2015 for review and comment.*

At this time, DBVI does not see the benefit of tracking the percentage of face-to-face time vs. administrative time.

**2015 State Plan: *Developing Recommendations for the State Plan- Rebecca Bridges***

SRC will wait until the regulations for what is required for the 2016 State Plan to revise the previous recommendations. However, the following suggestions were voiced:

- DBVI should develop a website (Dropbox, Google Drive, etc.) for the SRC to review and see documents and other materials
- VRCBVI and other services, in addition to VR, should be included on the Satisfaction Survey
- Using Virginia Voice as a public comment venue
- ½ hour to one hour updates with the Commissioner on Virginia Voice
- DBVI should expand the Public Meeting Announcements to other venues
- Development of Agency Marketing plan
- Revisit recommendation #10
- DBVI to provide letters of support for accessible/ affordable transportation grants

**Accountability: *Review of metrics currently being tracked by DBVI and the needs of the SRC- John Bailey***

The Council requested a report that showed accountability of the work DBVI completed. The report would include any legislative changes, employment types and average wage information, as well as, standards and indicators. Ms. Payne reported that the Standards and Indicators report that was given to the Council is the same report received by the Federal government for accountability of the Agency. The information requested by the Council is included within the Agency Report that they receive quarterly. Discussion of the format of how the information is shared with the Council occurred. The conversation ended with the conclusion that since the information is already being provided on a quarterly basis, there is not a need to change the format.

**Looking Forward to Tomorrow- John Bailey**

Tomorrow's meeting, March 14, 2015, will be the more formal meeting with an agenda to facilitate the meeting; it will include an opportunity for public comment. Outside persons are invited to comment about their agency or organization to partner with the Agency in addition to providing the council with an opportunity to ask questions regarding the Agency Report. Commissioner, Mr. Ray Hopkins, Deputy Commissioner, Dr. Rick Mitchell, and the Policy and Training Coordinator and SRC Liaison, Susan Davis Payne will be available for any questions that council members have about their reports. Committees/ working groups (Employment and Marketing) will present their reports. After the reports, any new or old business will be discussed. Lastly, the date of the next meeting will be announced to ensure members have ample notice to ensure attendance.

Those interested in talking more about the marketing committee, Kim, Pat, and Linda.

**Next Steps and Action Items**

The Chair asked for ideas and/or suggestions for working lunch presenters. Ms. Broady-Meyers mentioned a local contact who works with blind veterans. She will send the Chair information.

Ms. Swystun posed a question about how VRCBVI is changing job development at the Center for future trending

employment types; she will, also, email the Chair with more information.

**Adjournment**