

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

For the

State of Delaware, Division for the Visually Impaired

MEETING MINUTES

February 13, 2017

9:30am - 1:00pm

Location: Smyrna Rest Area

5500 DuPont Pkwy. Smyrna, DE 19977

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. McAllister called the meeting to order at 9:45am.

II. ROLL CALL

Kevin McAlister (Chair), Blake Roberts (Co-Chair), Elisha Jenkins (DVI Director, Member), Dava Newnam (DVI Deputy Director), Sonya Lawrence (Member), Deborah Bradl (DVI), Debbie Harrington (Member), Debra Talley (DVI), Grisel Espinosa (DVI), Lloyd Schmitz (Teleconference), and Susanne Howell (Member, Teleconferenced).

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Joint Finance Committee – Ms. Harrington raised concerns about the lack of communication among the council members/agencies. She shared concerns about the task force recommendations and ensuring that the entire council was working toward the same common goals. In regard to the Task Force recommendations that came out last year, Mr McAllister asked if DVI had moved forward with any of those recommendations. Ms. Newnam stated that a week prior DVI submitted to legislation in regard to the 14 to 1 student/ teacher ratio. Mr. McAllister stated that this information should have been shared with the council when it was submitted to keep everyone on the same page. Ms. Jenkins

joined the discussion acknowledging that DVI submitted to legislation the same information that was submitted last year under Gov. Markell with only the minor adjustment of the 14 to 1 student/teacher ratio. Ms. Harrington questioned why the other recommendations, such as the 12 month entitlement, were not submitted. Ms. Jenkins responded that one reason DVI hadn't yet addressed the other recommendations was due to the new members amongst the council and administration. Ms. Lawrence stated that everything is still connected to title 14 which will confuse the legislators because the only recommendation that was addressed was the 14/1 ratio. Ms. Jenkins stated that DVI was given 24 hours to submit the legislation- which they complied. She explained that as a department, DVI's policy person collects the proposed legislation from all of the Divisions and forwards that information to the governor's office. A few of the Council members took issue with the DVI policy person only providing 24 hours' notice to submit the information. Mr. McAllister asked if that time restraint was the reason that only the one recommendation was addressed. Ms. Jenkins explained that timing had a lot to do with it however it was not meant to be an end-all conversation; DVI wanted to at least put the student/teacher ratio on the radar as a foundation to be able to submit additional requests onto. Ms. Harrington stated that there was a huge missed opportunity to present the other main things that the council has been working on such as the Entitlements, state-wide Accountability Officer, and braille language. Her main concern is that we have given the new governor the impression that student/teacher ratio is our only concern.

Mr. McAllister asked what DVI's assessment was and what was advised by DVI as the next steps that need to be taken. Ms. Jenkins stated that 2 things were requested. One was analyzing what it would take to have a program that would meet the needs of the blind and visually impaired students. The other action item was to provide the teachers' salaries for the surrounding states; and to determine if there were any Loan forgiveness programs for

teachers. Mr. McAllister asked if the task force had gathered any of that information and Ms. Harrington replied that although the items were talked about, the information was never formally gathered onto a document. Ms. Lawrence added that Dawn Jackson was gathering that information, as well as looking into a program with U of D to train teachers at one point. Ms. Jenkins stated that she did gather that information and submitted it to leadership. It was determined by that data that we are competitive in regards to salaries.

Ms. Lawrence again spoke of her concerns about the lack of information sharing and different perspectives, and asked that moving forward if DVI could incorporate more of their advocates perspectives in future decisions. Ms. Jenkins responded point taken. Ms. Harrington reiterated the importance of being on the same page before speaking with the governor or legislators.

IV. NEW/SPECIAL BUSINESS

A. Annual Retreat/Town Hall Meeting – Mr. McAllister sent out a draft that he created based upon previous retreats with a few new ideas. He put together a skeletal agenda with some key topics and some people that we should engage. He asked for feedback from the council regarding the draft and suggested moving forward with the planning. There were no concerns from the members about what was presented in the draft document. He explained that he was moving the retreat to Dover Downs not only because it is an accessible location for everyone, but also a great location for a town hall meeting. Everyone agreed on the location.

Mr. McAllister also talked about the agenda for Friday from 9-12 and inviting different agencies to come out to speak. Ms. Lawrence suggested reaching out to the airports. Ms. Howell also agreed that someone from the airport or TSA would be a great addition. He stated that as of then he had DVI-VR, DART, Amtrak,

and BAA on the agenda. Ms. Lawrence recommended inviting someone from the SSA to come out and speak about SSI & SSDI. Mr. McAllister stated that if anyone thinks of any other agencies to invite please get in touch with him via email as quickly as possible. At this time Mr. Lloyd Schmitz joined the meeting.

From 12-2:30pm is a meeting with the DHSS Secretary, DVI Leadership, and ISO (Ms. Jenkins would make that request to her office). As a back-up plan to the ISO part of the agenda, Ms. Lawrence suggested the local Blind and Visually Impaired Groups (such as GAC, Blind-Sight DE, NFB, ACB, BEP/ BVC, DIB, and VRAC) have a panel discussion about who they are and what they do for the community.

From 3-5:00pm is scheduled for training and strategic planning. If anyone has any training requests or thinks of a training that would benefit this council please reach out to Mr. McAllister ASAP. Trainings and Strategic Planning would go into Saturday 3/18 as well discussing topics and doing some training around education, employment, Independent Living with the underlying tone of transportation. There was discussion among the members about the size of the council and splitting the council into smaller groups for these trainings. The Council members suggested having VR Counselors come out on Saturday to speak on their job/ perspective of their job. Ms. Bryson explained that she would ask the Counselors if any would volunteer their Saturday however, realistically the Counselors would not want to spend their weekend at work instead of with their families. Incentives were discussed, and Ms. Bryson stated that she would try her best to get some counselors on board. Mr. Schmitz asked if the VRAC would be looking for new members to be on the Council. Mr. McAllister answered that the council is always looking for fresh ideas and new members.

B. *Healthy Vision Month* – Ms. Jenkins stated that on Saturday May 18th, 2017 from 5:00 -7:00pm the Delaware Children’s Museum

has offered for children to come in for \$2.00/child for Healthy Vision Month. The members talked about ways to divert the \$2.00 fee for children in our program.

- C. *White Cane Day* – White Cane Day will be held on Monday October 16th this year. There is no definitive location as of now, however Dover Downs would be a good location. Ms. Lawrence proposed presenting an award in honor of Ms. Deborah Briddell that would be funded by the council.

V. DVI

- A. *DVI-VR Administrator Report* – Ms. Bryson reported 280 people on their caseload. So far this year there have been 6 successful closures (meaning they have been employed more than 90 days). A review of the caseload revealed 22 individuals are ready to work and 6 have been employed less than 90 days. Also, there are 60 individuals in training or a higher education program. There are 98 transition-aged students (aged 14-21) and 120 transition aged students aged 14-24.

In regard to the requested “quarterly report” on closures, there were 11 closures in the last quarter, 6 achieved employment at Amazon (over \$13.50/hr.), DCYFS as a mobile therapist (\$39,000/yr.), Perkins Academy as a chef (\$18.80/hr.), Home Depot as a stocker (\$11/hr.), and Wawa (No benefit info. provided), and JP Morgan as an analyst (\$33.90/hr.). 5 clients would not respond or we couldn’t locate, and 8 clients decided they were no longer interested in services or employment for various reasons. Ms. Bryson also reported that they are following up with all of the closures with a survey and are collecting feedback on that currently. On January 26th there was a Parent Information Session held at the Biggs building and via teleconference. 5 Parents and 2 transition professionals attended this event that featured Frequently Asked Questions about how to navigate the education system. The next Parent Information

Session is scheduled for Wednesday February 22nd and will feature a college/career night discussion with someone from \$tand by me to help answer FAFSA questions, and discuss the paid internships and volunteer opportunities this summer. Ms. Bryson talked about what VR is doing to assist the DIB employees and also introduced the new downstate VR admin Grisel Espinosa.

B. DVI Director Report – Ms. Jenkins reported that a demonstration was put on by Eye Wear technology and described some of the products that were featured. She also stated that DVI holds monthly lunch and learn sessions for team members to come in and outside vendors to showcase their products. There have been 2 new hires, Orientation & Mobility specialists.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Lloyd Schmitz asked about the pathways program, and Ms. Bradl explained the program to Mr. Schmitz. He also asked about the education numbers and asked if all of the TVI's are on the Deeds website. Ms. Jenkins answered that until she received the information that she has requested she cannot update the website.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. McAllister adjourned the meeting at 12:35pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amber Mangini