

COUNCIL ON THE BLIND (COB)

Meeting Minutes March 6, 2020

Welcome & Call to Order. Chair Jillian Queen welcomed everyone to the meeting and called the meeting to order at the Smyrna Rest Stop Conference Room, 5500 N. Dupont Highway, Smyrna, Delaware 19977 at 10:11 am.

Roll Call. Council on the Blind Members: Patti Addison, Deidre Morris, Lloyd Schmitz, Jillian Queen. Telecom: Ken Rolph. Absent: Kat Bottner, Pat Carzo.

Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI): Director Sandra Miller, Michele Hamilton, Jamie Towns. Telecom: Asst Deputy Director Deborah Talley, Jill Morrison.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP): Wayne Marsh

Members of the Public: Mary Marsh, Rob Keller.

Old Business

Minutes. February 2020 minutes were read. Corrections: spelling and grammatical errors were noted. The corrected minutes will be sent out. Lloyd Schmitz made a motion to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by Deidre Morris. Motion passed.

Micro Market. Jamie Towns reported updates on progress of implementation of Micro-Market Accessibility. The console audio option will be implemented mid-year. Churchman's Market does not have braille labels yet. The term "grabbers" was mistaken for door handles. Due to safety concerns, Deldot prefers "call for assistance" button use instead of product grabbers for wheelchair-bound consumers. Further study is being done concerning a motion-triggered audio message upon entering the MicroMarket, which is a high-traffic area. The research will check if help is readily available and how often it is required. Large print will be implemented to Council's recommendations of 24 dpi bold black print on white background, 1.5 spacing. The Council thanked Jamie for the update and is looking forward to further updates. Lloyd asked Sandi to send him the signage policy that is on file with DVI.

Minutes Production. Jillian Queen asked for assistance with COB meeting minutes. There were no volunteers. Sandi Miller said she would send her report as soon as possible. Jillian thanked her and said she was exploring speech to text transcription methods as well.

Bylaws Establishment. Jillian asked for assistance to write a set of Bylaws for the Council on the Blind. She would like the Bylaws to specifically address the fact that, with so few Council members, she has been concerned about attaining a quorum virtually at every meeting. Other Councils allowed remote voting. Lloyd said it needs to be in the legislation, but it is on the legislative agenda to allow conference call voting. To further this goal, Lloyd suggests to call the legislatures. Deidre Morris volunteered to assist in writing the Bylaws.

Council Members. Jillian said there were at least two prospective applicants interested in December. She assumed when the Sunset Committee concluded, they would be appointed. It is especially important to Council members that do not desire re-appointment. Legislation states members remain on the Council until such a time that someone has replaced them. Jillian will contact the Governor's office to ask the status of the applicants and when we can expect them to be appointed to the Council. She will report her findings.

New Business

BEP Audit. Lloyd requested a copy of the 2019 annual outside audit of the BEP, but the audit was not conducted. Sandi explained the confusion between approved policies and pending policies. Operations must be conducted under the approved policies. What policies are approved and which are still pending? Sandi said that the document Lloyd emailed contain the approved policies in the first 12-13 pages, followed by the pending policies. Will there be an audit? Yes, but not before April 15. Lloyd suggested Deb Wallace and Kathy McGinnis for a scope. Sandi said they are not at that point yet, but will consider these suggestions. Lloyd said the last audit did not address missing funds of \$148,000. Processes for checks and balances, as well as corrections, should be established. This would ensure that vital information is accounted for in detail.

Lloyd said he was informed the 1990 rules and regulations didn't go through the proper channels and did not get approved. Sandi will look into it. Wayne Marsh reported there have been mixed messages. Committees were to be called, which didn't happen. The Blind Vendors Committee (BVC) resubmitted several times, in addition to the overall Agency submission. They are aware of the issues. Policy development will be discussed at the next BVC meeting. Sandi said overall monitoring has been changed. The RSA-VR monitoring team may do a more in-depth look when they are here with DVI. She sees the RSA meeting as a great opportunity to resolve these issues and to get closure on the policies. She suggested for Council to generate a list of questions to send to the liaison, Terence Martin, in advance of RSA arrival.

Director's Report - Sandi Miller reporting.

Independent Living Skills (ILS). Feb 24, the "A Matter of Balance Project Team" [Easter Seals, DVI, Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSSAPD), Delaware Office of Volunteerism, 50+] held an introductory session for individuals interested in participating in the 8-week program to be held at BlindSight on March 9, 2020. Eleven individuals are currently enrolled.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP). The Herman Holloway campus will be one of four sites (potential other sites: DSU, DelDOT – Dover, Transportation Hub in Rehoboth) for the next round of healthy vending taste tasting sponsored by Public Health and the BVC. Dates have not yet been determined.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Updates to Facts and Figures: Current caseload 194, Individuals Ready to Work 31, Transition Aged Students (14-21 years) 77, Education and Training 45 Successful Closures (FY 2020) 10. Four since last month.

Discussion about Communication: Calls to DVI go to the main phone line; the call is then redirected. The consumer does not know who to ask for. Can any of the administration do intake? Yes. Patti emphasized the need for the human element. People that are stressing need to know when to expect a response which should be within a day or two at the most. She suggested staff leave their schedules on their voicemail. Our consumers are not computer savvy and want to talk to someone. Jillian said the website does not have contact information. People feel comforted by seeing a name and phone number. Sandi said DVI recognizes that more information needs to be available. Sunset recommended becoming more accessible. The website will be changed to be more user friendly with posted policies. The issues are that permission has to be given for any changes. Also, there isn't a designated person to keep the staff information current. The main line is just an access point and is directed to a staff person who is always available? Yes. Ken Rolph asked if the Council members may have the extension list? Sandi said yes. She is open to more suggestions and feedback. Lloyd said that it is still a lot better than what it was.

Vacancies. Interviews will be held 3/16 for the VR District Administrator. Also, an Employment Services Specialist resigned. A second Employment Services Specialist position may be redefined as a Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinator. Council recommends the position be assigned to the Kent County office, centrally located to equitably serve the state. Sandi said that is a good suggestion. The position is posted as statewide. Applicants need to have some idea of where they will be assigned. Lloyd asked if there were 4 new teachers starting the TVI program? No, that was a misunderstanding. Sandi said there are 4-5 applicants that will be interviewing for TVI positions in March. They are special education teachers. If hired, they would then start the program.

Education. Jillian asked what school districts have in-house TVIs. Sandi will find out. Jillian said she feels districts take advantage of DVI. Why should they hire TVIs if DVI is going to serve their students? If each district were to contribute something to DVI for this service, the money could replace the missing district portion that is preventing TVIs applying to DVI. This model was started by the Eastern Shore of Maryland Education Consortium. During a Nationwide shortage, ESMEC does not have vacancies. That says they are doing something right. Sandi said Sunset made similar suggestions. There is a group that is looking at different models for low-incidence populations.

Orientation & Mobility. O&M Specialists "Transition Day" with O&M, VR, ILS, and the University of Delaware, are planning an on-campus experience at UD for our students during the Spring Break Youth Program. Students will be paired with a UD student, attend classes, go into the dining hall, and practice their orientation and mobility skills as they traverse throughout the campus.

Updates referrals. Reporting period 10/1/19 to current: ILS 55, Elderly 149. Reporting Period 7/1 to current: Education 40, Orientation & Mobility 94. There is no compensatory time nor overtime due by either the Education or Orientation and Mobility Units. That's awesome.

DVI Leadership changes official. Sandi Miller is DVI Director officially. Deborah Tally is the temporary Deputy Director short term. Congratulations were extended. Debbie's position temporary? Six months. Sandi said there are a lot of things that need to get done and we have people who are willing to step up and move forward. Debbie said she feels Sandi has a good plan. But she was happy where she was and would be comfortable sliding back into her former role at the end of six months if it works out that way. Lloyd is optimistic.

Accessible Offices. Lloyd asked about accessible offices progress and fixed bus routes. Sandi said that they are in the process of getting the incidence report of the needs of the all the public that could benefit from a fixed route there, rather than that of the visually impaired alone---to get this going it needs greater numbers. Lloyd said he attended a meeting and

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asked about the fixed bus route. They didn't know about the request. Why is this? Sandi said that she wanted to meet first to discuss whether it is easier to make the route and offices there accessible or to move to a new location. Lloyd said that DHSS has a lot of offices currently used for storage. DVI can do a lot to improve that situation moving to a more accessible location. Sandi said that it isn't off the table to do that.

Meetings Report. Sunset: The revised recommendations were presented by the Joint Legislative Oversight and Sunset Committee in February, the DVI holdover supplement is available on the JLOSC public meeting. DHSS presented to the Joint Finance Committee February 25-27. There is still a lot of work to be done, but updates won't be as difficult. It was a good week with the entire Department feeling very positive. Sandi thanked Lloyd for his public comments.

Scheduled. RSA monitoring prep calls will be held in March and we continue to provide requested documents.

Public Comments

Patti congratulated Sandi and Debbie on their positions.

BlindSight sent out their newsletter with announcements of the programs scheduled.

Matter of Balance March 9 Mel is working with Chris Oakes.

Jillian congratulated Sandi and Debbie on their positions and said she looked forward to working with them.

Adjournment Patti Addison made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Lloyd Schmitz. Jillian Queen adjourned the meeting at 11:55 am.

Respectfully submitted by,
Jillian Queen