

# **COUNCIL ON THE BLIND (COB)**

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## **Meeting Minutes**

Remote Meeting April 3, 2020 10:00 am

**Access Telecom Phone: (302) 526-5475 Conference ID: 9430238**

**Welcome & Call to Order:** Jillian Queen, Council Chair, welcomed everyone to the Council on the Blind April 2020 Meeting held virtually through Skype on April 3, 2020 at 10:00 am.

### **Roll Call**

**Council Members:** Lloyd Schmitz, Ken Rolph, Patti Addison, Deidre Morris, Kat Bottner, Jillian Queen Chair. Absent: Pat Carzo.

**DVI Staff:** Director Sandra Miller, Deputy Director Deborah Talley, Michele Hamilton, Jamie Towns, Jill Morrison.

**Public:** Wayne Marsh (BEP), Terri Marsh, Carol King-Reyes, Rob Keller.

**Minutes:** The March 2020 minutes and February 2020 corrected minutes were emailed. No corrections were noted. Ken Rolph made a motion to accept the March meeting minutes, seconded by Patti Addison. Motion passed. Note: Later in the meeting, the acronym DSAAPD was corrected.

### **Old Business.**

**Remote Business:** Jillian informed the Council that the Governor's office responded allowing the Council to conduct official business by remote methods.

**Council Appointments:** The Governor's office responded citing the COVID-19 virus as the reason new applicants were not being appointed. The email was sent prior to the crisis; however, Jillian will not pursue a response at this time. She felt honored that this Council received a response at all.

**Bylaws and minutes:** No update on bylaws. No additional volunteers to do the minutes, however the minutes are easier to do in a virtual environment as long as background noise is kept to a minimum. Comments: Poor acoustics at the Smyrna Rest Stop meeting room.

**MicroMarket accessibility implementation update:** Jamie Towns reported virtually no movement, due to COVID-19, except for large print labels at DelDot. Churchman Road is closed, but the labels are available.

**BlindSight's COVID-19 response reported by Patti Addison:** All events and gatherings have been canceled through April 2020. Group meetings have been postponed. BlindSight is still up and running; Staff is working from home to continue Peer Support. In continual contact with clients, with calls, weekly when needed. Clients can leave messages or email. Patti said older clients are very stressed and mostly need phone contact. Also, BlindSight has someone who can get supplies for clients if they can't get out. Jillian said that is a testament that virtual communication can work, making clients aware they are not alone.

### **New Business.**

**Director's Report:** Sandi Miller reported DVI is COVID-19-related planning with many changes to the methods of providing services for the blind and visually impaired in the State of Delaware. Priority is focused on staff communication, and staff keeping consumers aware of what's going on. Looking for alternate ways to feel connected. Sandi said information and resources Lloyd has shared has been very helpful.

**Independent Living Services (ILS):** Developing a Consumer Assessment to determine additional needed supports and referrals. Top Priorities: basic needs, medicine, supplies, food. As a vulnerable population in danger of further isolation, the assessment also addresses needs related and unrelated, to visual impairment, such as mental health. Blindsight of Delaware and Covia (formerly Senior Center Without Walls), are providing telephonic peer support services, verifying consumers have a personal support network in place. Proactive information i.e. crisis numbers and community resources are being compiled to distribute to Agency consumers.

**Business Enterprise Program (BEP):** Developing a fair minimum return plan to assist operators experiencing lost wages due to decreased sales. Research on how other states are handling the situation is being compiled.

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**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** Staff are checking on consumers to see if, or how, they have been impacted by the coronavirus and to offer support. Staff is available to assist with unemployment benefits for consumers that have lost their jobs. Staff is attending training to develop strategies for providing services and getting information and resources to consumers virtually.

**Staff:** Pat Burrell is the new VR District Administrator. She will start April 13. One VR Counselor gave her notice, but will be with us until the pandemic passes.

**Current statistics:** Sandi explained that numbers will change, as people experience this crisis, their situations will change. Current caseload 185 Individuals Ready to Work 31. Transition Aged Students (14-21) (77) 34. Education and Training 45. Successful Closures (FY 2020) 10.

**Transition defined.** Sandi said a new internal process for transition students is being discussed. State and Federal transition definitions differ depending in terms of education or vocational rehabilitation, adult or student. Transitions are every part of life, but funding, how services are provided and by whom are determined by the method of definition, as well as what age services change. The idea is to keep the students with the same case manager. Sandi feels Counselors caseloads will not be unduly impacted by keeping them on their caseload. Jamie Towns will meet with counselors next week to discuss the idea, but it is all conceptual at the moment.

**Education:** Sandi shared Teachers' and Counselors' activities since March 16, which included personal contact with parents/ students, providing contact numbers, keeping them informed. Working with school districts to provide materials for students. A significant problem: Students' technology is locked in school buildings. DVI is coordinating retrieving devices for students. Staff are attending a variety of professional developments learning about virtual instruction/services. Staff meet to discuss more direct methods to request materials. The Men with a Mission service is halted. Teachers are generally not meeting face-to-face. Services are not being refused, but most consumers consider the safety factors. An adult moving to a new apartment, O&M services are critical to maintain safety. Lloyd Schmitz said the Department of Education may not be aware the Hadley School for the Blind remote program is an accredited school. Sandi will make sure to inform Erin and DOE. A call is already in to DOE, awaiting their response whether they will accept Hadley School for the Blind as an alternative learning platform for our students. Jillian is concerned for younger students, who may be unused to computers. Online learning requires a different skill set. Sandi agrees that the virtual environment learning curve and accessibility will be an issue. She will keep the Council updated. Resource lists are being pulled together for each department and placed on the website. Information is being shared, but being concise and accurate is vital. Facebook posts are halted. Personnel resources are too limited to post or monitor negative posts on Facebook. DSAAPD has an online resource guide. Council members expressed interest. Sandi asked Jill Morrison to coordinate.

**Summer:** Education is looking at the summer schedule, but it depends on a lot of timed factors. Program updates will be shared with the Council mid-month. Sandi asked the Council for suggestions and new methods.

**Orientation & Mobility:** In collaboration with DVI, Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Units, and the University of Delaware, the DVI's Orientation and Mobility Specialists are planning a "Transition Day" experience on the campus of the UD for our students during the Spring Break Youth Program. Our students will be paired with a University of Delaware student, attend classes, the dining hall, and practice their orientation and mobility skills as they traverse throughout the campus.

**YTD Referral Updates:** Education 47. Orientation & Mobility 95. Independent Living Services 58. ILS/Elderly 164.

**Staff:** Teachers' TVI Certification Time-frame limitation for teachers to obtain certification. Sandi said she will look into whether there have been any changes in the TVI certification program timeline.

**Agency Staff Updates:** One Counselor resigned, effective after the COVID-19 crisis. Interviewing has been stopped. Posted positions will be extended to 30 days instead of 7 days. Trainer Educators positions will also need to be posted. Sandi will get the link to the staff position descriptions, currently in place. All agreed the

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posting system and application questions are not consumer friendly nor accessible, but out of DVI's jurisdiction. Further discussion with Department of Human Resources is needed. Ken, Kat, Patti, and Lloyd volunteered to advocate for DVI in this regard. Debbie Talley suggested to have a meeting with Sandi to go over the positions. Agreed.

**Staff PD:** Jillian asked if DVI staff have access to the online Professional Development on the DOE website. She suggested staff follow Districts mandatory PDs, i.e. bullying and drug use, to remain consistent in the eyes of DOE. Debbie said that Sunset recommendations included staff structure funding. Suggestion was made that Lloyd, Debbie, Sandi, and Jillian conference call to get a list to send to the group for review.

**Office accessibility:** There has been no further movement or discussion to relocating to new offices. COVID-19 is preventing any thoughts on this topic at this time.

**RSA:** RSA monitoring has been postponed. That process has been stopped for now. Sandi will update the Council if anything changes. The combined state plan was submitted Tues or Wed to be reviewed.

**Upcoming Events Calendar:** None.

#### **Public Comments.**

**Dart:** Lloyd shared that Dart is not charging for Paratransit or fixed route as of today.

**Blindsight:** Patti shared all the staff are working from home continuing peer support. Anyone can leave messages and they will get back to them. Calls to consumers at least weekly. Patti said that the BlindSight newsletter was out last month, but is unsure when they can resume. So many things will need to be rescheduled. Same with DABA.

**Posts:** Carol King-Reyes commented about social websites. People are frightened and emotions are high. Negative posts are common in this kind of upheaval in spite of DVI posting facts based on solid resources.

Rob Keller expressed his wish to be together, but until then to use safe practices and social distancing. Be safe.

**Adjournment:** With nothing left for the good of the cause, Jillian asked for a motion to adjourn. Lloyd Schmitz made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ken Rolph. Motion passed. Jillian Queen thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting at 11:45 am.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Jillian Queen, Council Member