

Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped
State Rehabilitation Council
June 23, 2011 (Amended)

SRC Members Present – Mike Godino, Aaron Baier, Raymond Wayne, Jenny Santiago, Lisa Rosano, Linda Olson, Eric Randolph, Monica Redeye, and Bob Gumson. Brian Daniels (by phone), Ken Stewart (by phone) & Mindy Jacobsen (by phone)

CBVH Staff present: Tracy Cooper, Peter Herrig, Mary Ann van Alstyne, Mike Rose, Sharon Flom, & Steve Moore

SRC members absent: Patty Eishenhandler & Dennis O’Connell

Chair’s Comments

Mike Godino reported that at the next meeting (September 22, 2011), the council will need to pull together recommendations for the end-of-year report, due January 1, 2012. The SRC will present the report and vote on it before getting the Commissioner’s approval.

He welcomed Monica Redeye and Eric Randolph to the meeting. Mike asked if the Council could approve the March 2011 minutes. Aaron motioned that the minutes be approved and Jenny seconded the motion. Minutes were passed. Ken Stewart asked the council if meetings were on a Friday, rather on Thursday, would more people attend. However, the next meeting is on a Thursday and the December meeting in on a Friday. In the past, there has not been an issue with meetings on a Thursday.

Brian Daniels’ Presentation

Brian Daniels reported that, despite state budgetary and labor constraints in state government, this is much good news to report from CBVH.

After thoughtful feedback from critical stakeholders, The SAGE Commission has wisely determined that the Office of Children and Family Services remains the optimal state agency to host CBVH.

According to data pre-released by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, CBVH ranks second in compliance with federal Standards and Indicators among the 24 similarly situated public vision rehabilitation agencies across the country Brian stated that there was news from RSA. As of June, projections suggest that CBVH will maintain its high level of federal compliance and Brian expects that CBVH will have led the nation when the data is released next year. He thanked the SRC, a strong management team and an outstanding mix of CBVH veterans and new people in achieving our goals.

The State Legislature passed a bill on June 23rd, 2011, designating funding for the National Federation of the Blind’s Newslines from a dedicated fund managed by the New York State Public Service Commission. For many years past, CBVH has supported Newslines service through its federal allocations.

RSA will conduct its periodic on-site monitoring of CBVH's performance as they do periodically. The last monitoring exercise occurred in 2007 and included data through Federal Fiscal Year 2005. We anticipate that the RSA will monitor data and performance FFY 2006 – FFY 2010 Expectations are very positive for the monitoring review.

Brian informed the Council that he has assumed the role of Chair of the Advisory Committee to the RSA-funded Technical Assistance & Continuing Education at the University at Buffalo.

Brian informed the Council that the state hiring freeze continues and he does not anticipate the filling of existing vacancies in the near term, but remains optimistic that limited fills may occur before the end of the calendar year.

Mike Godino asked about Standards & Indicators - When standards are not met, states lose money. Conversely, when standards are met or exceeded, can CBVH get additional federal funding? Brian indicated that CBVH cannot get additional funding outside of requests for re-allocation of funding turned back from other states.

Bob Gumson asked about CBVH's position on reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act WIA. Brian reported that CBVH was in the process of developing its position.

Mike Godino asked about ARRA stimulus funding. Brian stated it's "like a moving target". It all depends on contracts like training and placements that are outcome based. Outcomes have to occur in order to expend the money. Alternative plans for remaining ARRA funds have been developed due to this uncertainty of full outcomes.

Brian expressed appreciation to the Council for their understanding of his physical absence from the meeting and of his need to call in his report as an alternative. Brian looks forward to attending the next meeting in person.

Action steps on the Interagency Council's priorities

Rosemary Lamb reported that there are seven state agencies involved with the Interagency Council: NYS Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, NYS Office for the Aging, NYS Public Service Commission, NYS Department of Health, NYS Department of Labor and NYS Education Department. The statute calls for public representation by public members, and by Senate and Assembly members as well. It was formed to examine issues related to the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing. Unfortunately, due to the fiscal crisis, the Council only has funding for three members. Rosemary reported that the Governor and Legislature will inform her about the future of the council. Rosemary will keep the SRC updated.

The Council determined a number of priorities as follows: (see also website: www.cqc.ny.gov)

1. Needs assessments
2. National survey
3. Info listed on the 10-year census

4. Info from State and Federal entities, including both education and community-based ones
5. Statisticians and researchers

Rosemary encouraged SRC members to look at the website and do the survey. She also wanted members to encourage others to do the survey – they want survey results from any and all deaf-blind sources by July 15, 2011. Please provide county of residence, support service providers, both with and without certification standards, and how do you provide enough interpreters when/where needed. (IL Centers will get this survey.)

Below are some samplings – see website for entire list:

Assistive Technology – CART

1. What actions/steps could be done to improve availability of translation services?
2. Assistive technology/info about medical devices
3. Both public and private insurance coverage of hearing aids (and why they're SO expensive – could the SRC start lobbying the manufacturers?)
4. Improve quality of education for children
5. Improve the public's understanding of the culture, attributes and means of communicating?
6. Input of other areas of need for future plans

American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) convention is an excellent national venue to address deaf-blind issues. There's an AADB convention held regularly in Washington DC and they discuss the many variations of sign language and funding issues. Also, when the American Council of the Blind holds their conventions, attendees who are deaf-blind have to bring their own interpreters (due to liability factors.) Occasionally, volunteers are available, but it's recommended that attendees bring their own Support Service Providers (SSP).

How do other states fund interpreters? Bob Gumson reported that a survey will soon be sent out to IL centers from the State IL Council addressing this issue about interpreters. Brad Williams will be doing this survey. We can look at Massachusetts, which has a separate State agency for the deaf and deaf-blind. Minnesota, Washington and Texas have a large deaf-blind population, so these states could be contacted to see what their policies are as well.

Mike Godino stated that Pratik Patel and Laurie Scharff of ACB would be good contacts about funding for interpreters and support services personnel that could present to legislature.

Linda Olson asked why hearing aids/devices are so expensive. Rosemary and Bob reported that \$2,000 dollars per aid is normal.

Executive Board Report

Mindy Jacobsen reported that there is a shortage of O & M/RT. Currently, only six students participating in the Hunter College O & M/RT training. This intensive training is mostly on-line, for three weeks each summer over the course of three summers. The main problem is that potential participants are not willing to travel out of their home area. RSA underwrites the

tuition, but of course graduates must be willing to travel as part of the job. Additional funds required for the upstate summer practicums are sponsored by CBVH ARRA funds.

The other problem is that Hunter's O & M graduates get hired with New York State without any experience, at an annual salary of \$50,000. Whereas the VA offers an annual salary of \$65,000, with no experience, and with experience, the VA pays \$90,000 to start.

The Executive Board is looking into getting additional funding for IL and ALP for services. Mindy reported that the executive board is also talking with the State Education Department about providing blindness skills to children less than 14 years of age, since they're not covered by federal funding.

According to Mindy's report, the BEP program has some good news – they have been approved for additional locations to be available. The goal is 12 new BEP stands in 2012, averaging one per month. Mindy indicated that more funding is needed for this to happen. Still, it's good to know that the additional locations have been added, or are in the works at least. (SUNY Albany and the Thruway Authority Headquarters are planning to have BEP stands opened there.)

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

Steve Moore reported that a Grade 18 was hired for database operations and "specialist-at-large." BEP is looking to add three more staff. Steve reported that BEP is researching how to improve BEP training, operations, and the referral system (how to determine whether a candidate is truly viable for the BEP program, including doing background checks, etc.).

A new stand location should soon be available at SUNY, and one at Thruway Headquarters. Stands around Albany should have at least \$25,000 annual profit to make it worthwhile, and \$50,000 for the NYC area. One stand in Utica may add limited food service to make it more profitable and to make it competitive with neighboring food establishments or another OGS snack stand. Profitability of stands is another issue which is being looked at on an individual basis. BEP is doing a video shoot for an ad campaign featuring the new talking lottery ticket terminals. CBVH's BEP program is the first state in the nation to launch these talking lottery terminals.

In other news, in NYC, the Mayor is trying to force BEP vendors to offer only healthy choices in their vending machines, as opposed to a true choice between, for example, carbonated beverages and fruit juice (it's starting with beverage machines, and will eventually expand to snack machines). This could easily put BEP vendors out of business.

Committee Reports

Policy & Planning Committee - Peter, Lisa, Aaron, and Sharon. The committee would like to be a part of the CBVH revision to the Assistive Technology policy and requested that one person from workgroup review. The group would also like to have the entire work group & SRC look at the policy and provide input.

Another topic was that College students need to know the contents of their IPE and have it updated as additional changes/services are needed. Reminder – college remediation courses

do not count toward the six years of college that CBVH can fund. One semester of remediation courses is allowed, and passing the placement test is required.

Incarcerated consumers who are blind was another topic discussed with the committee. The consumers need to be referred to the Protection & Advocacy office (see info on Rosemary Lamb's agency).

Workforce Development Committee - Eric, Mary Ann, Jenny, Linda, and Monica. It was recommended that Elaine Kost from the Department of Labor come and speak at an SRC meeting to discuss Disability Employment Initiative. Also recommended, was Ray Cebula or Edwin Lopez come a SRC to discuss Ticket to work and Benefits advisement. In NYC, seventeen consumers were recently hired for "Dialogue in the Dark," a program wherein people pay for the experience of going to a simulated café, an MTA stop, and some other places blindfolded. The blind consumers act as guides for the paying public so that a sighted person can experience being blind.

Membership committee – Jenny, Linda, and Tracy. There is a 2006 membership binder that needs to be updated with all pertinent information about the SRC. The newest section will include "the blindness movement" of the 1800's, and the Hadley School. The membership binder will also have a survey for new members to take. A suggestion was made that there be a report made about the competitive 121 programs.

Quality Assurance Committee –Ray, Mike, and Bob. It was mentioned that some of the successful outcome comprehensive service contracts will be audited. What about the unsuccessful outcomes? Shortcomings should be noted in the needs assessment report. Also, QA audits will be expanded to include DVE's (Diagnostic Vocational Evaluations). Needs assessment reports are done by CBVH every three years, so one will be due next year and be submitted to RSA.

Public Comment

Kathy Casey (Vice President of the American Council of the Blind of NY) commented about the Union College program for high school students that occurred last August. She thought that a broader participation should have happened with the consumer advocacy groups. This topic had been recommended by SRC at another meeting. Kathy Casey suggested for this year's summer program, she would like to see an increase of participation from the consumer advocacy groups.

New York Makes Work Pay Program – Michael Seereiter (Dept. of Mental Health, Director of Medicaid Infrastructure Grant).

The funding for the MIG stops at the end of this calendar year. OMH administers it, although various other State agencies participate in it. The program's goals are to identify and then break down barriers to employment. The website is: www.nymakesworkpay.org and Mike is the contact person.

Some highlights:

They're working on automating the tax credit incentive paperwork for small and medium-sized businesses. This has been a real barrier in the past, so hopefully the automatic process will be in place soon, with the info going directly to the IRS.

-Some of the job listings are specifically targeted for disabled employees.

-Some of the One-Stops have SMART – Skills Matching and Referral Technology.

-More good news for consumers – they won't have to go to their county DSS any more to apply for the Medicaid Buy-In Program anymore. The website will also help consumers get their Earned-Income Credit when filing with the IRS. It ties in with the IRS website. And it's supposed to be JAWS-accessible as well.

-Good news for employers – there is one billion dollars in unclaimed credit from the Ticket to Work program. Employers will be automatically notified if they qualify for the Ticket-to-Work credit.

The new system will replace the NYISER with the new, real-time employment system by the third quarter of this calendar year, 2011.

State Plan Update

Mike Rose reported that the 2012 State Plan will be sent to RSA by July. Brian had commented that the current SRC comments and recommendations on the State Plan are the best in years. For example, having a teleconference in February 2011 rather than a physical forum was much more practical. Seven comments/recommendations made by the SRC were all accepted and added into the report. For a complete list, please contact Mike.

ACB will have its annual convention in Utica the weekend of September 18th and NFB will have its convention in Albany the same weekend.

CBVH Financial report

Roger Gray first reported about ARRA funding and projects. Of the \$6 million awarded, \$4 million has already been spent. The balance is projected to be expended by December 2011. Some of the ARRA projects include: 410 CCTV's have gone out to 350 Senior Centers and nursing homes, HKNC to conduct an in-depth needs assessment of people who are deafblind in New York, staff training about disproportionate areas, minority areas outreach & outreach techniques, paid stipends for SUNY Buffalo students in vocational rehabilitation counseling, Hunter College remote mentoring for O & M and RT students, the 2 leadership program at Union College in Schenectady, added new equipment to tech centers, a pilot project testing new assessment tools for technology centers, and \$2.5 million for innovative employment training programs.

Roger reported that federal funding will remain the same for CBVH this year; the state funding for the elderly decreased, and will be replaced with ARRA funds.

BEP – Although the goal was for 12 new stands to be opened in 2012, several existing rest stop BEP vending machines will be closed.

Personnel – Seven staff vacancies have been filled in the CBVH District Offices. However, there are still 17 more vacancies.

Roger indicated that CBVH is still working on streamlining the accounting system with CBVH's CIS system so that vendors will receive their payments from the state in a timelier manner.

Action Items, & Deliberation and Discussion

The SRC discussed some action items that were possible agenda items: overview of the Section 121 program, Workforce Development-Benefits advisors – bring in an expert on this Ray Cebula or Ed Lopez who will focus on blindness as it relates to SSDI and other benefits & incentives, the PASS program, or Elaine Kost from DOL could explain Disabled Employment Initiative (DEI).

The SRC would like to explore an idea President Obama has about doing a pilot program wherein SSDI recipients would receive no penalty for working. How many of them would actually work, if there were no penalty? The state of Wisconsin is trying this out. In NYS, The Bronx and Buffalo have a youth program in place, where they get to keep their paycheck and SSDI. If possible, a representative from the local Social Security Administration could discuss this at one of our meetings.

The December 2, 2011 meeting was briefly discussed. Linda suggested having Molly Rimer from Helen Keller National Center report about the Needs Assessment that their agency conducted for CBVH.

Mike Godino motioned that the meeting be adjourned at 3:22 pm. Jenny Santiago seconded the motion and the meeting ended.

Minutes respectfully submitted by CBVH staff