

**DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2023**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3708173913?pwd=ei9NemZNcm5ERHIIRIVBT2p3d24zdz09>

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large, Board Chair
Erika Evans, At-Large
Theresa Petrey, ACB
David Henry, NFB
Tiffany Moore, AER

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron, BVA
James Caton, ASBVI
Larry Wayland, FAIRS
Eric Yarberry, WSB

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Tyrone Williams, ASBVI

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Sandra Edwards, OIB
Sandy Rowland, VFP

Attorney General’s Office Representative: None

Governor’s Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Betsy Barnes, Theresa Bertram, Amber Neal, DiAnnette Finks, Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes, Gustavo Manzanales, Amy Jackson, Sherlyn Harris, Deon Harris, LaTasha Mays, LaToya Baker, Thippasone Douangkesone, Tina Shores, and Brandy Bryant

Others Present: Molly Hernandez, Disability Rights Arkansas; Eric Tribett, DSB Consumer

Meeting Agenda Approval-

Vice-Chairman Erika Evans asked for a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Theresa Petrey made a motion to approve the agenda. David Henry seconded, and the motion carried.

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Vice-Chairman Erika Evans asked for approval of the March 10, 2023, minutes. David Henry made a motion to approve the minutes. Theresa Petrey seconded, and the motion carried.

Director’s Report – Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes began the Director’s report by thanking the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) staff, and the DSB Board for their support.

Dr. Williams-Stokes reminded members that the DSB Board Meetings are open to the public. Act 56 requires the agency to post the agenda and meeting information on the DSB website and

www.Arkansas.gov. Dr. Williams-Stokes encouraged board members to forward the meeting notice to their respective organizations.

Consumer Success Story: Eric Tribett

Pre-ETS Manager, LaTasha Mays, introduced Eric Tribett. Mr. Tribett shared his story as a DSB Pre-ETS consumer and 2023 Jump Start participant. The Board thanked Mr. Tribett for sharing his story and encouraged him to continue to strive for success.

DSB Board Member Appointments

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that voting Board members are appointed by the Governor. As of today, 2 members Keith Clark and Erika Evans are term-limited as of June 30, 2023, Tyrone Williams is awaiting reappointment and William “Bill” Heaston is deceased. She stated that the Governor’s office has been notified to address the vacancies. Board members should plan to serve until they are officially replaced.

Shared Services will continue within the Department of Commerce. DSB is currently receiving support in the areas of Human Resources, Fiscal, Communications, and Legal (DWS). Training has been provided for DSB staff in the fiscal section due to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) Fiscal staff turnover. DSB will continue to ensure vendors are paid timely and services for consumers are moving forward.

SFY 2023 Year End Closeout is in process. DSB will continue services to consumers during this process.

Corrective Action Plan for Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) - No Update:

Dr. Williams-Stokes provided the update on the Corrective Action Plan (CAP). The fourth quarterly update was submitted to RSA on April 30, 2023. Feedback from RSA has not been received on the April 30th submission. Commendations to the DSB team (Megan Lamb, program updates, Rhonda Garmon, fiscal updates, Sherlyn Harris, Quality Assurance updates, Betsy Barnes, Recruitment and Retention) that has coordinated and participated in meetings with the Technical Assistance Centers to ensure DSB addresses all the updates per RSA requirements. A summary of updates includes:

Finding 1 - Insufficient Policies-Draft policy revisions for fiscal and program are being finalized for the April 30th submission to RSA.

Finding 2 - Insufficient Internal Controls- DSB is working to update internal controls in AWARE and within the AASIS financial accounting system process. The process to procure a new grants management system (WebGrants) is under development. This has been delayed due to incompatibility with vendors and systems.

Finding 3 - Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible Students with Disabilities – DSB is currently able to track Potentially Eligible students in AWARE which allows counselors to provide, or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for VR services. DSB did not have that in place during the RSA monitoring review period 2017-2019.

Finding 4 - Obligations and Expenditures Not Properly Assigned to Correct Period of Performance -DSB is working with Alliance to address the budget module to ensure the period of performance is captured in AWARE. DSB is working to identify a grants management system or some other system that allows DSB to address the period of performance on the administrative side, capture non-Federal and Federal obligations, and ensure expenditures are paid from the correct Federal award for the VR award.

Finding 5 - Financial Management System and Internal Controls Fail to Ensure Supporting Documentation is Maintained - DSB has not exercised the requisite methods of administration, financial management, or internal controls necessary to ensure financial accountability and the proper expenditure of funds. DSB must employ methods of administration that ensure the proper and efficient administration of the VR program, including financial accountability. DSB must implement financial management and internal control procedures necessary to ensure the proper expenditure of program funds for allowable program costs. These procedures must include the retention of supporting documentation for the expenditures. The process to procure a new grants management system (WebGrants) is under development.

Finding 6 - Internal Control Deficiencies – Rates of Payment, Financial Reporting, and Personnel Costs- DSB is working with the TAC to develop effective internal controls and rates of the payment fee schedule to address this item. The procedures for PARS, the tool used to report and track Personnel costs, are under development. **A draft policy on rates of payment process was submitted on April 30th.**

Finding 7 - Lack of Internal Controls for the Development, Implementation, and Monitoring of Contracts- DSB does not maintain effective internal controls over the Federal awards necessary to provide reasonable assurances that it is managing the Federal award in compliance with Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the award. Specifically, internal control deficiencies exist for developing contracts, monitoring contracts, reviewing, and approving invoices, and supporting documentation, which does not permit DSB to ensure all costs charged to the contracts are reasonable, necessary, allocable, and allowable under the VR program. DSB does not have mechanisms to monitor and reconcile contracts reimbursed with Federal funds, to ensure that expenditures reported are accurate, allocable, and allowable, or to track, account, and report program and fiscal data for service provision accurately on the RSA-2 or RSA-911 reports. **The draft contract monitoring policy was submitted to RSA on April 30th.**

Finding 8 - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Reporting- DSB has reconciled the MOE reporting to include the Vending Facility Program Set-aside funds. **Updated reports will be submitted to RSA on April 30th.**

Collaborative Efforts:

Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) funding- Provides additional support for the OIB program needs and ensures DSB does not have a waiting list. These funds are under the state general revenue appropriation. \$700K is the current amount set aside for the OIB program. In addition, DSB will continue to operate with the federal grant award funds, the funds are available to all consumers who meet the requirements. As a reminder, technology services are available to OIB consumers. Consumers do not have to be Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) consumers to receive technology services, that is a misconception. DSB will continue to help individuals 55 and older receive those allotted funds.

DSB Gift and Bequest: The Board voted to purchase a recognition to the family of William “Bill” Heaston. The funds to purchase the plaque came from the DSB Gift and Bequest account. The plaque will be presented to his wife in memory of the great work he contributed to the DSB Board.

DSB Director will attend the American Council of the Blind National Conference in Illinois at the end of June and the CSAVR and NCSAB- EC meetings. Currently, the position held by Dr. Williams-Stokes, as President-Elect for NCSAB, expires on December 31, 2023.

Assistant Director’s Report – Betsy Barnes

Fiscal:

Included in the board packet are the SFY 2023 Budget Report and Expenditures for July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. DSB spent \$3,145,758.67 on Client Services and \$3,729,666.22 on Agency Operations, for a Total Expenditure of \$6,875,424.89.

Human Resources Update:

DSB has 55 employed staff or 72% of the positions filled. DSB has 6 Extra Help staff. Currently, DSB has 21 vacant positions. DSB is currently under a hiring freeze by the Governor. DSB has not been able to hire since January 2, 2023.

VFP:

DSB has a new Vending Facility Manager in training for our Little Rock area. DSB currently has 3 manager vacancies in Fayetteville, in Little Rock at the Revenue office, and the Capitol One/Court House combined locations. DSB successfully moved and installed new vending machines in all the LR/NLR locations and Fort Smith. These new machines have card readers and they have proven to be not only convenient for the customer but very profitable. The revenue on the highway locations is improving, however, the White River locations are not open. In August, DSB plans to have an in-person VFP Managers meeting and training. It is hoped that new board members will be elected and the new VFP policies will be approved.

OIB

Several months ago, DSB submitted a Letter of Intent to the Blue and You Foundation for an OIB grant of \$120,000. DSB has been selected for the next stage of the process. DSB will submit a

full grant application by July 15th. If DSB is awarded the grant, it will start in January 2024 and end in December 2024. These funds will enable the agency to use \$30,000 to buy independent living aids, \$50,000 for technology, and \$15,000 for staff training and certifications. DSB will also use \$10,000 for an Arkansas Big Data project with VisionServe Alliance for OIB data.

Recruitment and Retention Pilot Project:

DSB is one (1) of four (4) agencies in the nation to participate in a Recruitment and Retention Pilot project with VRTAC-Quality Management consultants. DSB has developed a Work Plan to be implemented during the next 2-3 years. Ron Vessell, one of the consultants, presented at DSB's May Leadership Retreat on Employment Engagement Surveys. Going forward DSB will develop a communications plan regarding DSB's mission and values. DSB also plans to have leadership team staff participate in a 360-degree assessment.

Ms. Barnes announced her retirement will begin on July 15, 2023. The Board staff individually thanked Ms. Betsy Barnes for her work. Dr. Stokes stated the final farewell and looks forward to seeing Ms. Barnes in reference to the other projects she has coming up including her efforts with the Lions Club.

QA Unit – Sherlyn Harris

Ms. Harris stated that the Quality Assurance section is thoroughly reviewing cases to ensure that the federal guidelines are met. The comprehensive review template has been revised based on recommendations from RSA. Consumer satisfaction surveys are mailed out monthly. The mailings are for both open and closed cases. Ms. Harris thanked Jeffrey "Scott" Seay for his hard work and dedication to DSB. She also stated that Scott is a great asset to the QA section.

Staff Update- DiAnnette Finks

DSB currently has 4 staff members working towards their master's degree in the Rehabilitation Counseling program. Bridget Glover, Stephanie Moten, LaTasha Age, as well as Jessie Foster who will be starting this Fall. Two staff members are preparing to take the CRCC Exam, Rakim Cheeks in October, and Angela Gray in July. Two staff are enrolled in master's programs at UALR, LaToya Baker in Human Resources and Heather Grigsby in the Rehab Counseling program. Jacob Grace is working on an internship in the Orientation and Mobility of the Blind (O&M) master's program at UALR. LaTasha Carter graduated from Southern Arkansas University with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. Two staff, Rhonda Garmon and Contrena Bowie, both successfully completed the APAC Certified Public Manager Program with Excellence for the year 2023.

Director Williams will be attending the American Council of the Blind Conference & Convention as well as the CSAVR Executive Committee Meeting & NCSAB Planning Meeting in July. Megan Lamb and Amber Neal will both be attending the NFB Convention in July. Seven staff members attended the National Symposium in Rehab Counseling and additional staff will be attending the Annual Field Staff Meeting in mid-June.

DSB Technology Lab Update- Gustavo Manzanales:

Gustavo Manzanales stated that the Technology lab is busy, and things are going extremely well. Counselors are referring high school graduates to the lab for recommendations and evaluations for technology equipment for the upcoming college summer and fall semesters. The Technology lab was able to provide work- based learning opportunities for two (2) Jump Start participants. The Jump Start workers have contributed to the update of devices and assistance to Tech lab consumers. The Technology Lab is continuing to offer online training to consumers. Mr. Manzanales said that ChatGPT and Monarch, a new braille display technology, were discussed at the CSUN conference. It was stated that attendance at conferences allows for the building of relationships with vendors and the information obtained can be shared with co-workers and consumers.

AIRS Update – Theresa Bertram

Theresa Bertram updated the Board on the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) program. Ms. Bertram stated that AIRS staff attended a transition fair on March 15, 2023. Staff also spoke at the Arkansas National Federation of the Blind Conference (NFB) held in Little Rock, AR in March, and the Arkansas American Council of the Blind (ACB) in April. Ms. Bertram also participated in the Leadership class held April 19, 2023, and the DSB Leadership Retreat in Hot Springs, AR held May 10-11, 2023.

Ms. Bertram thanked DSB and the Board members for allowing the advertisement and publication of reading services. Ms. Bertram has received feedback from people interested in AIRS services, and because of that listenership numbers are up according to ARPBS analytics at <http://airs.aetn.org>. AIRS averages approximately 1,400 listeners this month. AETN-4 Audio is accessible on television with local channels, and the platform has about 100 listeners weekly. AIRS Plus, which can be reached at (844)-888-0981, has approximately 2,500 listeners. Newline has approximately 300 listeners signed up with 100 loyal users. Information to join Newline is on nfb.org. AIRS Radio has 300 active followers on Facebook. AIRS is now on Alexa. The command is “Open AIRS Radio.” Ms. Bertram is working to get audio descriptions for theatre shows for consumers. AIRS also relies on DSB counselors to make consumers knowledgeable about AIRS services. Ms. Bertram thanked DSB and the Board for getting the word out about AIRS services. Dr. Stokes clarified that the NFB State Conference went well, however, it was a blessing to survive the impact of the tornado that was happening simultaneously during the NFB Conference.

Field Services Administrator’s Report – Dr. Megan Lamb’s Report

Field Report provided by Amy Jackson

DSB is working with the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (DWS) attorney to prepare the paperwork on the Field Policy manual chapters approved by the DSB Board to send forward for the next step of promulgation. DSB presented on its’ Supported Employment Pilot at CSAVR and the National Symposium on Rehabilitation Counseling as an example to other states. DSB is working to move forward with the selected pilot candidates and learning a lot along the way. As part of the pilot, DSB has already found ways to improve the forms for both vendors and counselors. Edits to the forms are being completed with support from the VRTAC-QE. The

apprenticeship pilot continues to move forward as well with consumers making progress in their training for the IT field.

DSB's rate-setting methodology was approved, and process implementation has begun for Field Services. Improved rates have been implemented for Jump Start and Orientation and Mobility. DSB is working through the documentation to set rates for the Pre-ETS and Diagnosis and Treatment Services. DSB will work through all service categories to set rates as part of the work on implementing the rate-setting methodology and process. DSB participated in the CSAVR panel in April to explain the process to create and implement a rate-setting methodology process.

DSB is working with NTACTION to design and provide training for Pre-ETS staff to enhance service and consumer outcomes from these services. This will focus on the new rates, new progress reports, and updated policy.

DSB's Cost Reimbursement Specialist, Thippasone "Wendy" Douangkesone, has been able to begin submitting claims to Social Security Administration (SSA) for reimbursement. Wendy is moving very quickly to try and ensure that DSB does not miss any claims due to filing late and starts having those funds come into DSB again. In May, Wendy had claims for \$13,677.01 approved by SSA for payment to DSB. DSB has not received the funds for the claims but will keep the Board updated.

DSB's Field Services Meeting will be June 20-22, 2023, in Hot Springs, AR with support from the VRTAC-QM. During this meeting, DSB Field staff will receive training on the updated policies, common eye conditions, rapid engagement, informed choice and IPE writing, and case management.

OIB Services and Outcomes Update

DSB is currently serving 471 individuals in the OIB program. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, which ran from October 2021 until September 2022, DSB received 476 referrals to the OIB program and closed 81 cases successfully. For Federal Fiscal Year 2023, which began October 1, 2022, DSB has received 307 OIB referrals and closed 86 cases successfully. DSB continues to provide assessments, assistive technology devices and training on them, surgical and therapeutic treatment related to visual disabilities, orientation, and mobility training, daily living skills, and transportation as needed to our consumers. DSB's largest service request continues to be for assistive technology devices and training on how to use them.

OIB Advisory Council Report

DSB's Cost Reimbursement Specialist has been able to begin submitting claims to Social Security Administration (SSA) for reimbursement. Ms. Douangkesone is moving very quickly to try and ensure that DSB does not miss any claims due to filing late and start having those funds come into DSB again. In May, Ms. Douangkesone, had claims for \$13,677.01 approved by SSA for payment to DSB. DSB has not received the funds for the claims but will keep the Board updated.

DSB's Field Services Meeting will be June 20-22 in Hot Springs, AR with support from the VRTAC-QM. During this meeting, staff will receive training on the updated policies, common eye conditions, rapid engagement, informed choice and IPE writing, and case management. While this information is targeted at VR it can directly apply to DSB's work with OIB consumers as well.

DSB's rate-setting methodology was approved, and implementation has begun for the process for Field Services. Improved rates have been implemented for Jump Start and Orientation and Mobility. DSB is working through the documentation to set rates for Surgical and Therapeutic Treatment. DSB will be working through all the rate categories to begin using the methodology approved by RSA. DSB participated in the CSAVR panel in April on the process to create a rate-setting methodology and implement it.

Old Business Section:

WIOA Update – Amy Jackson:

Amy Jackson stated that the RSA II is compiled by using the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023. The report categorizes expenditures by service category. For the same period of October 1, 2022, to May 30, 2023, the expenses by service category were as follows: assessment was \$8,796.59; diagnosis and treatment \$481,654.13; training \$1,143,676.12; job services \$8,300.00; transportation \$77,202.54; maintenance \$100,281.29; rehabilitation technology \$230,474.34; supported employment \$6,158.00; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$1,980.00; other services \$572,028.17; technical assistance \$580.00; customized employment \$5,000.00. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$20,349.17; four-year college \$298,053.18; junior college \$29,837.97; vocational \$85,535.10; on-the-job \$3,288.00; disability skills training \$193,769.38; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer's individual needs) \$424,922.32; job readiness \$87,921.00. Job services are as follows: job search assistance \$3,800.00; job placement \$500.00; on-the-job support time-limited \$4,000.00.

Amy Jackson explained that the RSA II not only outlines expenditures but identifies the number of actual participants who received each service. The services provided from October 1, 2022, to the present are listed in the following categories: assessment 27; diagnosis and treatment 229; graduate college 4; four-year college 45; junior college 10; vocational training 8; on-the-job training 2; disability skills training 28; miscellaneous training 27; job search assistance 5; job placement assistance 1; on-the-job supports time-limited 1; transportation 38; maintenance 19; rehabilitation technology 75; reader services 0; personal attendant services 1; other services 60; customized employment 3; job readiness training 8; and technical assistance 1.

An update on the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) was presented. Amy Jackson stated that the program year 2022 contains two-quarters of the data. The program year runs from July 1, 2022- June 30, 2023. For the year 2022, there were 23 Measurable Skill Gains, 22 secondary

report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and 1 skill progression, a rate of 23/151 is 15%. The target rate is 55.6%. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Program Year 2021 there were 37 Measurable Skill Gains, 23 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and 3 skill progressions. The rate of 36/140 is 25.7%. The target rate is 25.0%. A program year (PY) is divided from July 1 – June 30. The period used for reported performance measures is July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

Performance Measures PY2022 (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)

- ▶ Measurable Skill Gains
 - ▶ Target Rate of 55.6%
- ▶ Credential Attainment
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
 - ▶ Target Rate of 28.9%
- ▶ Employment Rate 2nd Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2021
 - ▶ Target Rate of 60.5%

- ▶ Employment Rate 4th Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
 - ▶ Target Rate 57.3%
- ▶ Retention with the Same Employer
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2021
- ▶ Median Wages 2nd Quarter After Exit
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2021
 - ▶ Target Rate \$5,697.00

2022 Credentials Earned

- ▶ Credentials Earned During PY
- ▶ 2 Master’s Degree
- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 3/10 30%

2021 Credentials Comparison – 2 Quarters

- ▶ 6 Credentials
- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ 1 Bachelor’s Degree
- ▶ 2 Master’s Degrees
- ▶ 2 “other” Certifications/Degrees
- ▶ No participants who exited Jan-Dec 2020 report a credential after the enrollment date in training with DSB.
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 0/7 0%

Employment Rate PY2022

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 47 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (47/210) is 22%
- ▶ Target Rate is 60.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 65 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (87/251) is 35%
- ▶ Target Rate is 57.3%
- ▶ Retention PY2022 (32/47) is 68.1%

National Credential Comparison Employment Rate PY 2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 59 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (59/197) is 29.9%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 57 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (57/225) is 25.3%
- ▶ Retention PY2021(56/94) is 59.57%
- ▶

2022 Employment Rate/Median Wages PY 2022

- ▶ At Exit - \$15.00 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$8,500.00
- ▶ Target Rate is \$5,697.00

2021 Employment Rate Comparison/Median Wages PY2021

- ▶ At Exit - \$14.00 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$7,262.69/quarter

Program Outcomes

- ▶ VR Program Year 2021 Closures (July 1, 2021 – June 2022)
 - 145 Closed - Rehabilitated
- ▶ VR Program Year 2022 Closures (July 1, 2022 – May 2023)
 - 142 Closed – Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (October 2021 - September 2022)
 - 81 Closed - Goals Met
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2022 Closures (October 2022 – May 2023)
 - 86 Closed - Goals Met

DSB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment - Betsy Barnes:

The UALR Survey Research Center conducted the 2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for the Division of Services for the Blind. DSB would like to share some of the key findings and recommendations from the report.

Arkansas has a higher incidence of persons with vision impairments than the national average. The highest incidence of vision difficulties in Arkansas is in Craighead and Sebastian counties.

Nationally and in Arkansas, females have a higher percentage of vision impairments than males.

Sixty percent (60%) of Arkansans with Vision impairments do not work compared to 17% for those without a disability.

Regarding income, 27% of individuals with vision impairments have incomes at or below the poverty level. 68% of individuals without a disability have incomes 2 times or more of the poverty level, while only 6% of those with vision impairment have the same.

Respondents to surveys, focus groups, and interviews noted the need for the following:

All noted transportation as a need for the consumers. While this is a problem nationally, DSB cannot fund transportation outside of pre-employment activities. Technology advancements have addressed some of transportation issues, however rural areas and underserved populations may not be able to access transportation, technology/connection services, or accessible accommodations.

General Service Delivery recommendations and considerations include: in-house staff to oversee benefits counseling, expanding hands-on training for technology, expanding outreach and marketing, additional service providers and partners, and addressing the barrier of those with accessibility limitations assessing DSB services.

DSB staff noted issues with recruitment, retention, and morale due to staffing shortages.

During the statewide transformation of agencies and consolidation and reorganization of physical office space, it was noted that DSB Leadership, administration, and service delivery components did an outstanding job navigating the transformation and coordination with the agencies.

It was strongly noted that business awareness and understanding of DSB services is a major issue. Employer perceptions were routinely cited as a barrier to placing blind and severely visually impaired individuals for employment. Within the underserved/unserved populations, there is a need for constant and continuous engagement and communication. Some of the recommendations to consider are: internships and apprenticeships, expanding partners meetings, communications, and networking opportunities, recognition of businesses that have successfully hired and retained employees with vision impairments, and featuring success stories of individuals and businesses.

With the Board's approval, the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment report will be posted on the DSB website.

2023 Performance, Goal, and Comprehensive System (PGCS) – Betsy Barnes

All DSB Supervisors completed their staff's performance ratings by May 17th. DSB is waiting for the date on which supervisors can conduct reviews with respective staff. DSB staff will notify the DSB Board of the employees eligible for consideration of the Employee of the Year Award.

New Business Section:

SFY 2024 Budget – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes: *Vote Required

Recommended Annual Operations Plan for SFY 2024 is as follows:

- Z85- Program and Services Budget: \$4,646,768
- Z84 Operations Budget-: \$6,704,130
- Total: \$11,350,898

DSB will apply for Reallotment funds through RSA if the funds are available.

Erika Evans asked for a motion to approve the SFY 2024 Budget for the Annual Operations Plan. David Henry made the motion to approve the recommended Annual Operations Plan for SFY 2024. Theresa Petrey seconded, and the motion carried.

State Plan Update- Amy Jackson:

DSB is working with partners to have a draft put together before October and there are section deadlines each month.

Report on Quarterly Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Advisory Committee Activities-Sandra Edwards or designee.

OIB Report- Sandra Edwards

Sandra Edwards was not present. A written report was provided to Board Members prior to the meeting.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Molly Hernandez

Molly Hernandez stated that Disability Rights Arkansas did not serve any DSB consumers under the Client Assistance Program this quarter.

Report on Quarterly AR State Independent Living Council (AR-SILC) Activities-. Dr. Sha' Anderson or the designee

Dr. Sha' Anderson was not present. A written report was provided to Board Members prior to the meeting.

FAIRS Update – Larry Wayland

No report was given.

Consumer Input:

David Henry with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) thanked everyone for attending the state convention. Mr. Henry commended the host hotel for making sure everyone was marked safe from the tornado. During the convention, the representative from Utah, Mr. Everette Bacon, provided good organization information along with the input of Theresa Bertram, and Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes. For example, having accessible technology for voting machines assisted by Molly Hernandez. The NFB Convention included job fairs in addition to auctions that displayed many interesting items. On July 1 – 6, 2023 the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) will be conducting its' National Convention in Houston, TX. Mr. Henry invited everyone to attend.

Theresa Petrey stated the American Council of the Blind (ACB) held the state convention on April 28 – 29, 2023. Jim Reynolds from the weather service spoke at the banquet and shared how he works to keep the citizens of the state informed about severe weather through alerts. Door prizes were donated to the convention which happen to be two weather radios. A representative from Nano Pac Calvin Churchwell attended and brought braille equipment to share with attendees. The American Council for the Blind National Convention will be composed of two components. A virtual component and then an in-person meeting. On June 14, 2023, there will be the constitution and by-laws.

There will be a silent auction scheduled on June 15 – 16, 2023, and a live auction on the 17th at 6 p.m. central time and prizes will not be disclosed until the bid closes. On June 19, 2023, there will be a call-to-order. Participants do not have to be registered for the conference to join the auction. The in-person conference dates are on June 30 – July 7, 2023, in Schaumburg, IL which will consist of tours, general sessions, and breakouts. On July 6, 2023, there is a banquet scheduled, and on July 7, 2023, two daytime tours and later that evening a cruise on Lake Michigan.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

Vice-Chairman Erika Evans stated the next board meeting will be held in Little Rock, AR on September 8, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. Erika Evans stated that this was her last meeting, however, she and Chairman Keith Clark will stand to be available if need be.

Motion to Adjourn:

Erika Evans asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Theresa Petrey made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Tiffany Moore seconded. The motion carried.

ADJOURNED at 2:46 P.M.