

**DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
DOUBLETREE HOTEL-HOT SPRINGS
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023**

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

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

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Pamela Armstrong, VFP
Terry Sheeler, OIB
James Caton, ASBVI
Eric Yarberry, WSB

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Tyrone Williams, ASBVI
Tiffany Moore, AER

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Larry Wayland, FAIRS
Kara Aaron, BVA

Attorney General’s Office Representative: None

Governor’s Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Theresa Bertram, Amber Neal, DiAnnette Finks, Gustavo Manzanales, Amy Jackson, Sherlyn Harris, Deon Harris, LaTasha Mays, LaToya Baker, LaTasha Age, Tina Shores, Megan Lamb, Brandy Bryant, and the entire DSB staff were all in attendance for the 2023 Statewide Meeting.

Others Present: Dr. Charisse Childers, DWS Director

Meeting Agenda Approval

Chairman Keith Clark asked for a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Theresa Petrey made a motion to approve the agenda. Erika Evans seconded, and the motion carried.

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Chairman Keith Clark asked for approval of the September 8, 2023, minutes. David Henry made a motion to approve the minutes. Erika Evans seconded, and the motion carried.

Director’s Report – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Cassandra 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 stated that she hoped everyone enjoyed the DSB 2023 Statewide Meeting and used the opportunity to learn new information.

Dr. Williams-Stokes acknowledged Superintendent James Caton due to his retirement from Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Mr. Caton briefly thanked DSB staff and leadership for its role in serving blind and visually impaired individuals. Superintendent Caton also stated that his tenure had been an incredible journey and that he appreciated DSB for being dedicated and committed to its partnership in serving consumers. Dr. Williams-Stokes also took a moment to recognize Shurshawna Lewis as one of DSB's newest VR counselors. Ms. Lewis was also previously one of DSB's consumer caseloads, as well as a student at Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that DSB would like to continue to recruit VR counselors from the field and DSB caseloads who are committed and dedicated to DSB's mission. Dr. Williams-Stokes acknowledged Dr. Charisse Childers for being in attendance. Dr. Childers thanked DSB for the invitation to attend the DSB 2023 Statewide Meeting. Dr. Childers thanked Dr. Williams-Stokes for the work DSB does daily, and for leading the DSB agency with compassion and care. Dr. Childers concluded by thanking the Board Members for attending and taking time out of their busy schedule to join this meeting.

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the most recent budget update was enclosed in the board packets and encouraged board members to contact her with any questions or concerns. DSB has moved forward with spending reallocation dollars to strengthen VR efforts that are already underway. Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked DSB staff that contributed to putting DSB in a position to qualify for Reallocation funds.

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that she is honored to serve as the Vice President of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) for calendar year 2023. Dr. Williams-Stokes announced that she is currently serving as President for Fiscal Year 2024 and is honored to serve to represent Arkansas Blind and blind agencies across the nation. She indicated that Randolph Sheppard will be considered a priority under her leadership. NCSAB is working with RSA to develop training to address turnover in the Randolph Sheppard program.

Gustavo Manzanales, Vending Facility Program Manager is working to increase vendor participation with the DSB Vending program and has a meeting scheduled with five new potential vending managers. Dr. Williams-Stokes expressed that Mr. Manzanales is working to reestablish the vending program prior to COVID-19. Five new locations are under review including the William J. Clinton Library and Museum. Organizations continue to contact DSB to inquire about setting up a new vending facility, however, DSB is required to secure a vending manager to operate a new location. Dr. Williams-Stokes gave recognition to the new President of the Vending Facility Program, Pam Armstrong for her leadership with the VFP efforts and asked that she continue to partner with consumer groups to spread the word about the VFP opportunity. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that DSB is a small agency but is working to ensure we empower staff and board members with resources to provide opportunities for consumers. Dr. Williams-Stokes reiterated that the conference theme this year matters to continue the success of the organization. She encouraged staff and board members to reach out to her if there were suggestions to improve DSB.

Corrective Action Plan for Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB)

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) issued by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is still in process. DSB has discontinued the use of the manual PARS process. The work completed on the CAP has been a team effort and she thanked the staff involved for going the extra mile to ensure DSB regains compliance in CAP areas of concern. Dr. Williams-Stokes also mentioned that there has not been an update from RSA on the report submitted in October 2023, however, Dr. Stokes has spoken with RSA and was provided with a summary of what will be included in the report. DSB will continue to work with the fiscal department to get a grants management system in place. The grants management system will include collaboration with Department of Commerce agencies to ensure shared services are utilized. A summary of updates include:

Finding 1 - Insufficient Policies-Draft policy revisions for fiscal and program are in the promulgation process. Resolved

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. DSB will share this cost with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) due to being in a shared services position.**

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. During the RSA monitoring review period 2017-2019, DSB did not have that in place. **Resolved.**

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 to capture non-Federal and Federal obligations and ensure expenditures are paid from the correct Federal award for the VR award. **Part 1 related to AWARE is resolved. The administrative finding is not resolved.**

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 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 payment fee schedule to address this item. The procedures or PARS or tool used to report and track the Personnel costs is under development. – **Resolved**

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 administration policy was submitted to RSA on October 30th. No updates are available.**

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

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

DSB has launched a Supported Employment Program for all staff during this statewide meeting with help from the VRTAC-QE and Virginia Commonwealth University. DSB has hired 2 new pre-ETS counselors, and 1 new VR counselor, and the new OIB counselor is scheduled to begin on Monday. Supervisors continue to interview and work to hire staff for the remaining vacancies. Staff continue to work on the State Plan and to develop training for pre-ETS team with NTACTION. During Statewide information was presented on the OIB program to the DSB Board and OIB Advisory Committee sharing the program regulations, challenges, and successes. DSB will continue to work with the OIB: TAC and DSB Board to improve services to ensure priority to meet consumer needs.

Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked Dr. Megan Lamb for her report and announced that since the last DSB quarterly board meeting, Dr. Lamb has been promoted to DSB’s Assistant Director position.

Quality Assurance (QA) Unit Update - Sheryln Harris:

The QA Unit has been working persistently these last couple of months exploring new platforms for distributing Customer Satisfaction Surveys. QA did an extensive search focusing on modifiable dashboards, the quantity of responses per year (via text messages, emails, and phone calls), and the training and onboarding process to acclimate us to the vendor’s system. QA

researched and evaluated the pros and cons to determine the best platform to fit the needs of the agency to produce the best possible return rate. The QA Unit has submitted a report for review.

AIRS Update – Theresa Bertram:

Theresa Bertram updated the Board on the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) program. Ms. Bertram stated that AIRS staff attended the VISION 2023 Denver conference in July and talked about the innovative technology.

Ms. Bertram has received feedback from people interested in AIRS services, and because of that listenership numbers have increased according to ARPBS analytics at <http://airs.aetn.org>. AIRS averaged approximately 1,400 listeners for the 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. Newslines has approximately 300 listeners signed up with 100 loyal users. Information to join Newslines 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 theater shows for consumers and reported that steps have been made in this area. 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.

Ms. Bertram talked about updated programming to include employment focused programming. The AIRS website at air.aetn.org has been revamped to show the updated programming.

Ms. Bertram gave a brief overview and expressed gratitude for the busy schedule the station has had during the holiday season and was looking forward to a slower pace in January.

DSB Technology Lab Update- Gustavo Manzanales:

Gustavo Manzanales stated that the Technology lab is busy, and things are going extremely well. The tech lab currently has two vacant positions. 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 continues to offer online training to consumers. Mr. Manzanales said that ChatGPT and Monarch, a new braille display technology, were discussed at the CSUN conference earlier this year. Information gained at the conferences promotes relationship-building with vendors and the information can be shared with co-workers and consumers.

Various conferences occurred in October and November. The partners' meeting in late October, DSB Technology staff provided a demonstration on technology for the visually impaired. In November, staff attended the NCSAB conference in Savannah, Georgia to learn more about the federal programs and network with other state personnel to learn how to best apply policies and procedures. The tech department is working closely with the counselors to make sure the beginning of 2024 runs smoothly to get students, and consumers equipped with accessible technology needs.

Dr. Williams-Stokes added that Mr. Manzanales presented at the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Statewide Meeting in November 2023. Mr. Manzanales in a shared role with Mr. Rick Anderson conducted two sessions on technology. This is important because DSB is a member organization on the ICAN board. Mr. Manzanales serves as a representative on the ICAN board which is a great opportunity for DSB to be at the table when business technology decisions are made.

Old Business Section:

DSB Board Appointments Update - Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Director:

Dr. Williams Stokes stated that voting Board members are appointed by the Governor. As of today, 2 members Keith Clarke and Erica Evans are term-limited as of June 30, 2023, Tyrone Williams is awaiting reappointment and William “Bill” Heaston's position is vacant due to being deceased. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the Governor’s office has been notified of the vacancies. Board members should plan to serve until they are officially replaced. Requests have been submitted by individuals who are interested, however, DSB is still waiting for the Governor's office to make a final decision.

DSB Board Annual Training Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Director:

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated the DSB Board participated in an annual training on yesterday primarily focusing on the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program. Dr. Stokes stated that it was hoped the information was helpful and reminded the board that they were a “supervisory board” which means that all the information that goes within the DSB agency is privy to all board members. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that sometimes the information is communicated verbally, while other times it may be disclosed in the board packets. Dr. Williams-Stokes hopes the training was beneficial to all the board members, and DSB will continue to deliver information to ensure there are no gaps in communication efforts.

Employee of the Year Announcement – DSB EOY Committee, Chairman Clark:

The Employee of the Year committee consists of Keith Clark, Theresa Petrey, and David Henry. The committee members would like to congratulate the DSB Employees nominated for the award. DSB would also like to take the time to thank the supervisors who took the time to nominate their employees through the state evaluation system. The committee received four recommendations for the employees who were nominated for the highest employee performance rating of “role model” and “highly effective” and for the pay increase that goes with that rating. The committee recommends that the nomination of one employee be awarded a cash prize of \$100 along with a plaque. The DSB Employee of the Year for 2023, goes to Rhonda Garmon for her dedicated service to the DSB agency and for being an outstanding representative for the Division of Services for the Blind.

Dr. Williams-Stokes also added that the DSB Employee of the Year award cash prize comes from the DSB Board's Gift and Bequest account and requires DSB Board approval.

Report on RSA WIOA Dash Boards/WIOA Update – Dr. Megan Lamb, Asst Director:

WIOA Update – Megan Lamb:

Dr. Megan Lamb stated that the RSA II is compiled by using the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) from October 1, 2023, to November 30, 2024. The report categorizes expenditures by service category. For the same period of October 1, 2023, to November 30, 2023, the expenses by service category were as follows: assessment was \$1,237.01; diagnosis and treatment \$67,369.39; training \$345,585.58; job services \$14,500.00; transportation \$19,742.37; maintenance \$23,704.49; rehabilitation technology \$98,219.54; supported employment \$0.00; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$0.00; other services \$165,142.94; technical assistance \$0.00; customized employment \$7,000.00. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$40,681.90; four-year college \$60,060.78; junior college \$2,414.36; vocational \$51,495.87; on-the-job \$300.00; apprenticeship \$4,515.23; disability skills training \$36,575.00; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer's individual needs) \$112,542.44; job readiness \$37,000.00. Job services are as follows: job search assistance \$0.00; job placement \$14,500.00; on-the-job support time-limited \$0.00.

Dr. Lamb 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, 2023, to the present are listed in the following categories: assessment 6; diagnosis and treatment 88; graduate college 9; four-year college 20; junior college 3; vocational training 5; on-the-job training 1; apprenticeship training 1; disability skills training 12; miscellaneous training 19; job search assistance 0; job placement assistance 11; on-the-job supports time-limited 0; transportation 20; maintenance 10; rehabilitation technology 29; reader services 0; personal attendant services 0; other services 57; customized employment 1; job readiness training 9; and technical assistance 0.

Dr. Lamb stated that the program year 2023 contains one quarter of data. The program year runs from July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024. For the year 2023, there were 3 Measurable Skill Gains, 3 secondary report cards, or post-secondary transcripts, a rate of 3/158 is 1.90%. The target rate is 55.6%. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Program Year 2022 there were 50 Measurable Skill Gains, 42 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and 5 skill progressions, 2 training milestones, 1 education functional level increase. The rate of 24/145 is 27.9%. 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, 2023 – September 30, 2023.

Performance Measures PY2023 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

- ▶ Measurable Skill Gains
 - ▶ Target Rate of 57.6%
- ▶ Credential Attainment

- ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
- ▶ Target Rate of 30.90%
- ▶ Employment Rate 2nd Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2022.
 - ▶ Target Rate of 61.5%
- ▶ Employment Rate 4th Quarter
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from Jan – Dec 2022
 - ▶ Target Rate 57.9%
- ▶ Retention with the Same Employer
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2022.
- ▶ Median Wages 2nd Quarter After Exit
 - ▶ Cohort of exits from PY2022.
 - ▶ Target Rate \$5,787.00

2023 Credentials Earned

- ▶ Credentials Earned During PY
- ▶ 1 Degree Above Master's
- ▶ 1 Bachelor's Degree
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 2/9 22.22%%

2022 Credentials Comparison

- ▶ 2 Master's Degree
- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ Reported Credential Rate is 4/10 40%
- ▶ DSB recognized as the most improved state agency by RSA

Employment Rate PY2023

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 93 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (93/199) is 46.73%
- ▶ Target Rate is 61.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 94 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (94/169) is 55.62%
- ▶ Target Rate is 57.9%
- ▶ Retention PY2022 (27/94) is 28.72%

Employment Rate PY 2022

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 94 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (94/211) is 44.5%
- ▶ Target Rate is 60.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 65 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (87/251) is 34.6%

- ▶ Target Rate is 57.3%
- ▶ Retention PY2022 (71/128) is 55.5%

Employment Rate/Median Wages PY 2023

- ▶ At Exit - \$16.00 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$8,764.30
- ▶ Target Rate is \$5,787.00

2022 Employment Rate Comparison/Median Wages PY2022

- ▶ At Exit - \$16.00 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$7,948.79
- ▶ Target is \$5,697.00

Program Outcomes

- ▶ VR Program Year 2022 Closures (July 1, 2022 – June 2023)
 - 149 Closed - Rehabilitated
- ▶ VR Program Year 2023 Closures (July 1, 2023 – June 2024)
 - 25 Closed – Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (October 2022 - September 2023)
 - 115 Closed - Goals Met
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2024 Closures (October 2023 – September 2024)
 - 25 Closed - Goals Met

New Business

DSB Board Officer Elections - Chairman Keith Clark: Vote Required*

Chairman Keith Clark opened the floor for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary positions for the DSB board. Chairman Clark asked everyone if there were any nominations for Chairman at this time. Chairman Clark personally nominated Mr. David Henry for Chairman of the DSB Board. Chairman Clark asked three times if there were additional nominations for the DSB Board Chair to confirm. Theresa Petrey moved that nominations cease, and that David Henry be elected by acclamation. Erika Evans seconded the motion. The motion carried. Mr. David Henry was elected as the new chairman of the DSB Board.

Chairman Keith Clark also asked for nominations for Vice-Chairman of the DSB Board. Mr. Keith Clark personally nominated Theresa Petrey for Vice-Chairman. Mr. Clark asked three times there were additional nominations for the DSB Board Vice-Chairman. Erika Evans moved that nominations cease, and that Theresa Petrey be elected by acclamation. Keith Clark seconded the motion. The motion carried. Mrs. Theresa Petrey was elected as the new Vice-Chairman of the DSB Board.

Mr. Keith Clark asked if any board members were interested in the DSB Board Secretary position. Mr. Clark stated that if anyone was interested in nominating, feel free to speak up. Dr.

Williams-Stokes suggested that the nomination for the secretary officer election position be tabled to the next quarterly board meeting since there were no nominations. Dr. Williams-Stokes congratulated the members on their new officer positions. Dr. Williams-Stokes also stated that DSB will work with the new officers and provide training on their new duties.

DSB Mission, Vision, & Values Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Williams-Stokes began by stating that the mission statement is important to DSB to ensure staff and others know where the agency is headed and how it operates. DSB has a mission statement in place, also Dr. Williams-Stokes asked that the leadership team stand to acknowledge the teamwork to update the mission statement. She thanked the DSB leadership team who participated in ensuring that the mission, vision, and values are still up-to-date and current. At the leadership meeting held earlier this year, a draft was composed of a few items that DSB would like to tweak to make sure the agency stays on target. DSB is looking forward to introducing a new mission, vision, and values statement that the DSB agency can be proud of soon.

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

OIB Report- Terry Sheeler:

Terry Sheeler provided a recap of the OIB training and is looking forward to finding new ways to implement other trainings and developments regarding keeping everything fresh by re-evaluating and updating the OIB processes. Ms. Terry Sheeler also thanked Dr. Megan Lamb and Gwendolyn Johnson for assisting with setting up the OIB training and is excited about moving forward as Chairman of the OIB Advisory Committee.

FAIRS Update – Larry Wayland:

No report was given.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Mollie Hernandez:

Mollie Hernandez stated that Disability Rights Arkansas does not have any open cases for 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. Fran Sha’ Anderson was not present. A written report was provided to Board Members prior to the meeting.

Consumer Input:

American Council of the Blind (ACB) - Theresa Petrey:

Mrs. Petrey shared that the Arkansas Council of the Blind has not held a Board meeting since the state convention in April 2023, although one will be held at some point next Fall. Mrs. Petrey shared that the ACB state convention will be held in Fayetteville in the Spring. The dates and location have not been determined and will be addressed at the ACB Board meeting.

Mrs. Petrey shared that while she attended the national ACB convention in Schaumburg, IL from June 30, 2023, through July 6, 2023, virtually, the state president, Rita Reese-Whiting went in person. As stated in the June meeting, there were two components to the national ACB convention, a virtual and an in-person component. Any members who wished to take part in voting had to be registered for the convention, whether they attended in person or virtually. Also, all members had to have their dues paid for the year 2023. Last-minute registrations were allowed but only at the opening of the in-person portion which did not begin until June 30.

Mrs. Petrey shared there were the general sessions which began on the evening of July 1 and then morning sessions which were from July 3 through July 6. Along with the general sessions, there were breakout sessions held in the afternoons, some of which were available via Zoom. Jason Yasner from the National Library Services (NLS) for the Blind spoke on new activities at the NLS.

The banquet was held on July 6. The keynote speaker for the banquet was Louie Sharp, a motivational speaker who talked about overcoming challenges. Mr. Sharp shared how he had to overcome personal challenges with family and how he aspired to learn all he could to succeed in life. Reports shared were that he received a standing ovation at the conclusion of his speech. Those who were able to attend in person were able to enjoy tours to such places and events as a beach party which was held at a nearby lake, a tour to Horizons for the Blind, a Chicago White Sox baseball game on July 4, a described play of "Tommy", two opportunities to go to a museum where antique music boxes and carousels were available for persons to touch, and a dinner cruise on Lake Michigan. Those in attendance were also able to check out new technology in the exhibit hall.

National Federation of Blind (NFB) – David Henry:

David Henry stated The National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas has been very active since the last Board meeting in June. On July 13, 2023, NFB members from Arkansas attended the National Convention for the National Federation of the Blind in Houston, Texas. This Convention had an attendance of around 2,500 members. These members attended many of the blind workshops for employment, accessible devices, and career-building sessions. Our National Convention is where NFB discuss and pass resolutions that will enhance the blind community and help others understand the needs of individuals who are blind to live an independent life. Several speakers from major technology organizations as well as other Federal Agencies tell how they are trying to improve the lives of the blind community. Daniel O'Rourke, a former hockey referee, stated that he would be traveling by bicycle on Route 66 from California to Illinois to help promote Braille literacy.

The Organization has been gearing up to participate in several events in Arkansas such as Bikes, Blues, and BBQ in Northwest Arkansas, Hillcrest Festival in Little Rock as well as events at World Services for the Blind celebrating White Cane Day and Blind Equality Achievement Month (BEAM) in October. Many of the local chapters are fundraising around the State for the programs and services provided by the Federation.

World Services for the Blind (WSB) – Eric Yarberry:

Eric Yarberry stated he just finished his first year as CEO at World Services for the Blind. Mr. Yarberry thanked DSB for supporting WSB and himself. This quarter WSB has had a lot of growth and just received \$300,000.00 from the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management to improve campus security. The fund will be spent on camera coverage and better lighting on the exterior of the WSB campus. The funds will also go toward maglock doors and key fob entry. This will give LRPD access to zoom into cameras on the exterior of the building. These changes will help create a positive impact on the neighborhood and community. WSB also received a contract out of Canada to provide assistive technology instruction to Canadians as well. The close relationship with ACBREP who certifies the certified assistive technology instructional specialist which is the number one program in the nation associated with WSB. Continued growth with this program is exciting for WSB as well as regarding Arkansas recognition. Lastly, WSB had an incredible opportunity to interview the associate producer Joe Strechay of the Netflix series *All the Light We Cannot See*. Mr. Yarberry encouraged the DSB staff to look at WSB's Facebook page and retrieve all the updates the organization is currently doing.

Arkansas State Independent Living Council Update – Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes on behalf of Dr. FranSha' Anderson:

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the Arkansas State Independent Living Council (ARSILC) open-house is schedule for December 14, 2023, from 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. The invitation is for any staff or community representative interested in learning more about what ARSILC does and will require an RSVP. For any staff interested in attending, Dr. Williams-Stokes encouraged them to reach out so that the information can be made available.

Division of Services for the Blind Director – Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked Mr. Keith Clark and Erika Evans for their dedication and support as Chairman and Vice-Chairman. She stated that it was an honor to work with Mr. Keith Clark and Ms. Erika Evans and wanted to publicly thank both members as they transition out of the leadership roles for the DSB Board. Ms. Erika Evans stated that working with the DSB Board has been a wonderful endeavor. Ms. Evans stated that the DSB Board has empowered her in many ways with the shared experience of working with the school and as a former client at times. Ms. Evans stated that she was a special ed teacher and that she had been teaching resource courses to students for 28 years. Ms. Evans stated that this was her first-year transitioning into a self-contained role as a teacher as well as working with visually impaired

children. Ms. Evans highlighted a moment where she was able to assist her students and direct them for assistance to the DSB agency and the VR services offered. Ms. Evans said that due to her experience of being on the DSB board and learning about the services that DSB offers to visually impaired and blind individuals in Arkansas, she has been able to open doors and help students receive the services they need. Ms. Evans finished by thanking the entire DSB board and staff for the work they do on behalf of all individuals who are blind and/or visually impaired. Mr. Keith Clark took a second as well to thank the DSB board and specifically mentioned Dr. Williams-Stokes for being very helpful and easy to work with. Mr. Clark also thanked Ms. Erika Evans, Theresa Petrey, Mr. David Henry, and Dr. Childers. Mr. Clark concluded by saying that everyone on the DSB board had become friends and that he truly appreciated that.

Schedule of Next Meeting:

Chairman Clark stated the next DSB Statewide Quarterly Board is scheduled for Friday, March 8, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Motion to Adjourn:

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

ADJOURNED at 11:06 a.m.