

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

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

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

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

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

William “Bill” Heaston, Lions

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Sandra Edwards, OIB

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, Gwendolyn Johnson, Contrena Bowie, and Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes.

Others Present: Jessica Amos, UALR Survey Research Center

Meeting Agenda Approval-

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

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Chairman Keith Clark asked for approval of the September 9, 2022, minutes. David Henry made a motion to approve the minutes. Erika Evans seconded. 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 indicated that she was pleased with the progress of the statewide meeting and thanked board members and staff who attended the DSB Board working meeting on Thursday night. 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.

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that Board members are appointed by the Governor and an attendance report is submitted annually to the Joint Performance Legislative Committee to Comply with Act 276 Of 2021. Two items were highlighted from the Act:

- A state board or commission that has not convened a meeting or has convened without a quorum for two (2) consecutive regularly scheduled meeting dates within the preceding two-year period shall vote to elect a new chair and vice chair.
- (c)(1) If a state board or commission has not convened a regularly scheduled meeting or has convened without a quorum for four (4) consecutive regularly scheduled meeting dates within the preceding two-year period, the Joint Performance Review Committee shall reevaluate the purpose, need, and effectiveness of the state board or commission.

Corrective Action Plan for Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) - Dr. Williams-Stokes provided the update on the Corrective Action Plan (CAP). **The fourth quarterly update is due to RSA by January 30, 2023.** We received feedback on the October 30th report on yesterday. Dr. Williams-Stokes commended the work that the DSB team has completed to coordinate and participate 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 January 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.

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 access to track potentially eligible data.

Finding 4 - Obligations and Expenditures Not Properly Assigned to Correct Period of Performance -DSB has addressed the budget module to ensure the period of performance is captured in AWARE. Fiscal staff has identified a grants management system to address the period of performance on the administrative side and capture non-Federal and Federal obligations to 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 a rate of the payment fee schedule to address this item. The procedures or PARS or tool used to report and track the Personnel costs

is under development. **DSB has a draft policy on rates of payment process that will be submitted on January 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. **Draft contract monitoring policy will be submitted to RSA by March 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 by March 30th.**

Collaborative Efforts:

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that she was elected President-Elect at the Fall National Council of State Agencies for the Blind meeting. She stated that she was honored to represent the Division of Services for the Blind and plans to focus on strengthening partnerships with organizations to improve our efforts to recruit and retain qualified staff in the VR program which is a challenge for many VR agencies across the nation.

Assistant Director's Report – Betsy Barnes

Fiscal:

Included in your board packet are the SFY 2023 Budget Report and Expenditures for July 1, 2022, to September 30, 2022. DSB spent \$1,046,123.70 on Client Services and \$1,251,646.89 on Agency Operations, for a Total Expenditure of \$2,297,770.59

Human Resources Update:

DSB has 63 employed staff or 81% of the positions filled. DSB has 15 vacant

positions that are either being advertised, conducting interviews, or pending completion of background checks or assigned hire dates. Since our September Board meeting, staff that has joined the DSB family are Emily Turner, Administrative Analyst – Outreach Unit, Mary Armstrong - Administrative Specialist II Little Rock Office, Beth Medlin - Fiscal Support Analyst – Finance, and Jean Genereau Administrative Specialist II – Fayetteville Office. DSB had one resignation this quarter. Billie Rodgers, Rehab Counselor in the Jonesboro office. DSB QA Administrative Analyst Justin Smith will be leaving us next week to go to work for HUD. December 31st, Jim Pearson is retiring after 35 years with the state. DSB wishes him a wonderful retirement.

Staff Development:

DSB has four staff working toward their Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling program: Heather Grigsby, LaTasha Age, Bridget Glover, and Stephanie Moten. LaToya Baker is enrolled in the Master's in Human Resources program at UALR. Jacob Grace is completing his Internship in the Orientation and Mobility of the Blind (O&M) Master's program at UALR. Dr. Megan Lamb, Field Administrator is in Washington, DC this week completing her Executive Leadership program at the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute with San Diego State University. Our Pre-ETS Manager, LaTasha Mays has completed her Vision Specialist Certification with the University of Mississippi State. Staff and vendors have completed the Virginia Commonwealth University Supported Employment Certification program.

In October staff attended the WIOA Partners meeting.

Last month staff attended Council of State Agencies for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) conferences in San Antonio. Staff also attended the Arkansas Education AER State Conference.

Recruitment and Retention Pilot Project:

DSB is one of 5 agencies in the nation to participate in a Recruitment and Retention Pilot project with VRTAC-Quality Management consultants. DSB participated with other states in a panel discussion at CSAVR. DSB will now develop a Work Plan to be implemented during the next 2-3 years.

DSB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment-Betsy Barnes:

The UALR Survey Research Center has completed our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and submitted its draft report. Jessica Amos provided an overview with the DSB Staff of the information from the report.

Field Services Administrator's Report – Dr. Megan Lamb's Report was provided by Amy Jackson

Field Services continues to work to update and resolve Rehabilitation Services Administration Corrective Action Plan policy requests. Jacob Grace recently received the Tom Phifer Award from AER for all his hard work. Staff continues to attend training and conferences to ensure they are keeping up to date on regulations and best practices. DSB is working with the Quality Employment Technical Assistance Center to develop a Supported Employment pilot for the new policy and training for staff and vendors. The rate-setting methodology has been submitted to RSA and while awaiting final approval, DSB works with the Quality Management Technical Assistance Center to gather the data to allow rates to be ready when approval received.

DSB Technology Lab Update- Gustavo Manzanales

Gustavo Manzanales stated that DSB is still working with the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI). Mr. Manzanales was recently invited by Mr. Caton and Mr. Williams to an ASBVI event to demonstrate technology. Mr. Manzanales stated the DSB Tech Lab has 2 vacant positions. Some of the tasks under development in the tech lab are updates to all equipment and software to ensure to remain current. DSB purchased new software and technology and communicates with vendors such as NanoPac, Inc., and Eschenbach to remain updated on the latest technology for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The pandemic presented a challenge and DSB created an online course curriculum that allowed training to be delivered to clients who need it and not limited to individuals who could attend in person training at the Tech Lab. The online training allows for services to be expanded into local offices to help clients to become more efficient in chosen skill. Mr. Manzanales stated that DSB has made accessible technology services a priority. Dr. Stokes chimed in and asked Mr. Manzanales to talk a little about the CSUN training he will be participating in next year. Mr. Manzanales responded CSUN is a conference that displays and demonstrates all sorts of mainstream technology from major manufacturers like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon and is held in California. Mr. Manzanales stated

the benefit of attending this conference is that they have a disability department that meets and gives great presentations on new developments. Mr. Manzanales stated the CSUN conference introduces mainstream technology to blind and low visually impaired individuals to encourage employment. Mr. Manzanales the conference is a great opportunity to meet people working on the accessibility side of these corporate companies, a way to obtain more information, and make new connections with the companies. A consumer asked if services can be received in Perryville. Dr. Stokes stated that DSB covers the entire state of Arkansas and with a referral an appointment can be set up to assess the individual's needs. Mr. Tyrone Williams asked Mr. Manzanales to provide him with information about the CSUN Conference so it can be shared with staff and students who may be interested in attending from ASBVI.

Old Business Section:

DSB Board Training Update – Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes

The DSB Board's role is to provide supervisory responsibility for the Division of Services for the Blind agency operations including budget, policymaking, employees, and professional development as a requirement under state and federal law. The training provided to board members on December 9th by the VR Technical Assistance, Quality Management was to educate members on the ethical, legal, and fiscal roles and responsibilities of serving as a board member. Dr. Williams-Stokes encouraged members to contact her with any follow-up questions.

Employee of the Year Announcement – Chairman Keith Clark

Chairman Keith Clark thanked the EOY Committee for helping select the Employee of the year. The committee was composed of Chairman Keith Clark, David Henry, and Theresa Petrey. Chairman Clark stated after hours of consideration, it was determined that the winner of the 2022 DSB Employee of the Year and Overall Employee of the Year was Heather Grigsby. Ms. Grigsby will receive \$100 cashier's check for each award at the awards ceremony this afternoon. As a reminder the DSB awards the funds for employee awards from the DSB Gift and Bequest Fund.

RSA/WIOA DASHBOARDS/WIOA UPDATE –

DSB Program and Financial Report PowerPoint – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

A written report was provided and emailed to the board members prior to the meeting. Dr. Williams Stokes presented the report and after a lengthy discussion members applauded DSB for their recognition received from RSA in several categories on the data dashboards.

WIOA Update- Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes:

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the RSA II is compiled by using the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) from October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022. The report categorizes expenditures by service category. For the same period of October 1, 2021, to present, the expenses by service category were as follows: assessment was \$13,085.24; diagnosis and treatment \$727,506.60; training \$1,243,630.87; job services \$9,800.00; transportation \$57,288.20; maintenance \$86,135.25; rehabilitation technology \$342,878.77; supported employment \$0; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$7,524.00; other services \$913,301.58; technical assistance \$1,250.70. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$51,173.85; four-year college \$351,380.20; junior college \$48,737.25; vocational \$124,124.47; on-the-job \$4,640.00; disability skills training \$247,528.03; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer's individual needs) \$327,533.47; job readiness \$88,513.60. Job services are as follows: job search assistance \$2,000.00; job placement \$7,000.00; on-the-job support time-limited \$800.00.

Dr. Williams-Stokes explained that the RSA II not only outlines expenditures but identifies the number of actual participants who received each service. The services provided October 1, 2021 to present are listed in the following categories: assessment 38; diagnosis and treatment 264; graduate college 8; four-year college 44; junior college 15; vocational training 14; on-the-job training 4; disability skills training 36; miscellaneous training 31; job search assistance 3; job placement assistance 4; on-the-job supports time-limited 1; transportation 53; maintenance 25; rehabilitation technology 110; reader services 0; personal attendant services 1; other services 88; reader 0; job readiness training 9; and technical assistance 2.

An update on the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) was presented. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the program year 2021 contains two-quarters of the

data. The program year runs from July 1, 2022- present. For the year 2021, there were 50 Measurable Skill Gains, 42 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, 5 skill progressions, 2 training milestones, and 1 educational functional level increase. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Program Year 2021 rate is 24/145 is 28.2%. The target rate is 25%. The MSG national comparison for blind agencies is 52.6%. The national average is 43.0%. In Arkansas, DSB and ARS combined is 59.4%.

The Program Year 2021 – 2 Quarters

- ▶ 6 Credentials
- ▶ 1 Vocational/Technical Certificate
- ▶ 1 Bachelor’s Degree
- ▶ 2 Master’s Degrees
- ▶ 2 “other” Certifications/Degrees

National Credential Comparison PY 2021 – 2 Quarters

- ▶ Blind Agencies - 31.7%
- ▶ National Average – 30.8%
- ▶ Arkansas (DSB and ARS) – 23.9%

Employment Rate PY2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 114 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (114/197) is 57.87%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 65 Participants
- ▶ Employment Rate (65/225) is 28.89%
- ▶ Retention PY2021 (56/94) is 59.57%

National Credential Comparison PY 2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit/Blind Agencies – 44.2%
- ▶ National Average – 52.5%
- ▶ Arkansas (DSB and ARS) – 55.5%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit/Blind Agencies 35.6%
- ▶ National Average 48.0%
- ▶ Arkansas (DSB and ARS) – 49.6%

Employment Rate Q2: Variability PY 2021

- ▶ First Quarter – 57.9%
- ▶ National rate 44.2%
- ▶ Arkansas employment rate at Exit – 62%
- ▶ National rate – 51%

Median Wages PY2021

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

National Credential Comparison Median Wages PY 2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit/ Blind Agencies \$7,263
- ▶ National Average \$4,776
- ▶ Arkansas (DSB and ARS) - \$5,635

Median Earnings Q2: Variability PY 2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter - \$7,263
- ▶ National Average PY 2020 - \$4,773

Program Outcomes

- ▶ VR Program Year 2021 Closures (July 1, 2021 – June 2022)
 - 145 Closed-Rehabilitated
- ▶ VR Program Year 2022 Closures (July 1, 2022 – November 10, 2022)
 - 38 Closed – Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2021 (October 2020 - September 2021)
 - 35 Closed-Goals Met
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2022 Closures (October 2021 – September 2022)
 - 81 Closed-Goals Met

NEW BUSINESS:

The DSB Gift and Bequest fund was established for use by the Division of Services for the Blind board to receive donations to support the efforts to serve individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The account is with Regions bank. The bank account is monitored by legislative audit, and all withdrawals must be

documented. Federal grant funds cannot be used to buy promotional items; however, the board can authorize DSB to purchase promotional items using this bank account. A record is maintained of individuals or organizations who donate to the account and a report will be provided at the quarterly board meetings. Dr. Stokes stated the Gift and Bequest form is on the DSB website. A thank you note is mailed for all donations received. Tiffany Moore asked if the donation was tax deductible. Dr. Williams-Stokes responded that the donation is tax deductible. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that a vote was needed to continue the use of the DSB Gift and Bequest fund to enhance the lives of blind and visually impaired Arkansans as the board deems fit.

Approval to continue the use of the DSB Gift and Bequest Funding Account-

David Henry made the motion to continue the use of the DSB Gift and Bequest funds to benefit the agency in assisting blind and/or visually impaired individuals., and Erika Evans seconded. The motion carried.

DSB Needs Assessment Update – Jessica Amos UALR Survey and Research Center:

Jessica Amos the Assistant Director of UALR Survey and Research Center introduced herself to DSB staff and stated that on behalf of her director who was traveling abroad handling other business, was pleased to present the findings of the 2022 Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment that was conducted for the Division of Services for the Blind. First, the environmental scan illustrated general information about population and economics. The first scan focused on population, economic, and disability characteristics. The second scan was more specialized for the blind and visually impaired community. The information was gathered from a variety of sources including the US Census Bureau, the US Department of Commerce, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data from population characteristics and the DSB dashboard were compiled for the more specific scan. This information came from the US Census Bureau and specifically the American Community Survey, which is published annually, in addition to some WIOA data. According to the environmental scan, In Arkansas, there is a higher incidence here compared to the national average. The incidence of vision difficulties, out of 11 counties, is centralized in the northeastern and west central parts of the state including Craighead and Sebastian counties, respectively. Also, gender differences, with vision difficulties determined that women are a higher incidence

than men based on statewide and national averages. The distribution of vision difficulties displayed that higher incidence occurs according to age differences. It increases at an exponential rate as individuals get into higher age ranges. The gap between Arkansas and the national average starts to widen as the age group of 74 is approached, then tapers off at age 75 and above. Arkansas has higher rates for all age groups listed compared to the national average. Work experience for those with vision difficulties was worst for individuals in Arkansas in 2019 with about 60% not working. The survey demonstrates that employment outcomes were less for those that worked all year around. Income distribution relative to the poverty line is concentrated at or below the poverty line for individuals with vision difficulties, which can be largely attributed to the lower work experience levels. Just under 27% of individuals with vision difficulties have incomes at or below the poverty line. With only 12% of individuals without a disability in the same category. Conversely, 68% without a disability have incomes that are two times or more than the poverty line. And 46% of individuals with a vision disability are at that same income level. The methodology used to implement this study was a mixed-method approach that included survey data, focus groups, interviews, and staff participation with 45 staff choosing to take the assessment. There was a little difficulty connecting with businesses, but in future assessments, it is hopeful that DSB will have more participation. Yet, there was decent partner participation, but the exact number is not disclosed. Consumer participation was great, consisting of 63 open consumer cases currently receiving services and 37 closed consumer cases. Focus groups were conducted among field counselors, field managers, partners, and the Board of Directors. Interviews were conducted specifically with senior management, and an alternative was provided for participants who could not attend an interview or focus group, yet the option was given to provide a typed response. The staff and partner survey results are extensive however, they will be provided in the final report. The general finding of the staff and partner survey was based on the primary concerns with staffing. The primary concerns were related to recruitment, morale, and retention. 83% of respondents had concerns about recruitment. 97% of respondents had concerns about morale. 89% of respondents have concerns about retention. Services readily available through DSB that consumers have access to our assessments, training, Pre-ETS transitional services, diagnoses, and treatments, the ability to work with OIB, and rehab technology. Additional service efforts needed are resources for mental health treatment, therapeutic services, and benefit planning assistance. The barriers to employment specifically related to blind and visually impaired individuals stem

from consumers not having significant work experience and wanting to improve training in that area. Employer perception, housing issues, poor social skills, and wanting to develop more soft skills so that consumers can work more effectively in the workplace. And transportation is listed as the main reoccurring barrier to employment. The top reasons individuals find difficulties in accessing DSB resources are Covid 19 which presented some unique challenges, the physical location of the DSB office, slow service delivery completing consumer applications, and language barriers as well. The consumer satisfaction survey revealed that 83% of consumers with open cases were generally overall satisfied with the services they received, and 13% indicated some level of dissatisfaction. Across of 6 categories mentioned the areas of the most concern were the 2 areas of providing sufficient services and helping consumers obtain a job. Also, another concern is counselors informing consumers on how to reapply if they need additional services. The right to disagree and appeal decisions revealed that 85% were satisfied with being informed, while 15% were not. The survey also revealed that consumers were split when it came to using accommodations or equipment with 49% responding no, and 51% responding yes. The detailed information about the type of equipment or accommodations used was indicated to be the use of technology like computers, assisted software, and talking tools. Also, it was indicated that canes and hearing aids were also used as equipment accommodations as well. All respondents rated the technology and accommodations as effective, with no respondents stating dissatisfaction. The survey revealed that 81% of consumers had health insurance. The survey also indicated that 53% of consumers were currently not employed, with 47% indicating they were employed. According to closed cases, the survey indicated that the consumer's satisfaction rate was 76%, while 24% indicated some level of dissatisfaction. The consumer satisfaction rate for closed cases as previously reported across all 6 categories revealed that 72% of respondents were satisfied, with the primary areas of concern or needing improvement being providing sufficient services, helping consumers get a job, and general satisfaction with consumers' career goals. The right to disagree and appeal decisions for closed cases revealed that the majority felt informed. The use of technology and equipment among closed case consumers indicated 51% indicating no, and 49% indicating yes. The rating on accommodations and equipment among closed cases indicates the majority was satisfied and considered the accommodations and/or equipment to be effective. The survey indicates for closed cases that 77% have health insurance. When asked were close case consumers employed there was a split with 56% indicating yes,

while 44% indicated no. The survey asked if closed-case consumers needed further assistance with maintaining employment with 71% indicating no, and 29% indicating yes. This reveals that the majority of closed-case consumers are thriving and doing well with employment. However, the closed-case consumers who indicated needing further assistance were encouraged to reach out to DSB to obtain assistance with needed services. The general findings illustrate the need for transportation is great. Technology accessibility and special equipment were mentioned. Employer perceptions serve as a barrier as well, so therefore, continuing to educate employers about the assets that blind and visually impaired individuals can contribute to the workplace is a need. The need for training is vital, so finding trainers that can help further develop skills for the workplace is important. Working with clients and employers to promote business engagements is essential. Focusing on the region's specific needs whether it is housing or transportation is critical. Mobility and self-independence training as well as soft skills and job training. From an internal and external consentience perspective, everyone is in uniform agreement that DSB is effectively meeting consumer vocational rehabilitation service needs. Among both open and closed consumer cases there is a general positive consumer satisfaction rating regarding experiences and outcomes with DSB. Accommodations and responsiveness to consumer needs were highlighted as being exemplary. The underserved populations within the state mentioned racial and ethnic minority groups which include the Black/African American community, the Native American indigenous community, the Hispanic and Latinx communities, as well as the Marshallese population present in Arkansas. Specific disabilities status included the hearing impaired, the death and blind community which consists of dual diagnoses, individuals diagnosed with psychiatric or mental health issues, those requiring long-term or extended services, as well as those with the most significant disabilities. There were some underserved geographic areas which included the Delta region and southern Arkansas. Age-related groups included youth, which is addressed through the Pre-ETS program, elderly which is addressed through OIB services, and Veterans were mentioned as well. With regards to general service delivery needs the survey showed that focuses need to be placed on vocational aspects in maintaining employment, transportation, technology, benefits counseling, staffing shortages, employee burnout and workload issues, vendor availability, and limited felon services. From an internal perspective on DSB's perceptions, it was determined that across the data there is a shared mission, value system, and vision for the organization. Internal staff shared that there is a collective understanding across all

the internal constituencies. From an external perspective, it was largely positive as far as organizational reputation. It was positive for consumers who are aware and understand the mission and services of DSB, and consumers who have interacted with partners or service recipients. Many external constituents shared not being fully aware of the services offered or the existence of the organization. As mentioned by Dr. Williams-Stokes, it is important that DSB is not referenced as the best-kept secret. Therefore, DSB should continue to engage with the community to get the word out about the services and technology tools offered. With regard to business engagements, some areas were noted as needing improvement or extra support. So, the need for internships and more experience opportunities including apprenticeships for consumers, having quarterly partner meetings, more board recognition of business partners, expanding external awareness, increasing communication and marketing, and featuring success stories amongst consumers and businesses to dispel any misconceptions employers may have to show those blind and visually impaired individuals are a great asset and contributors into the workforce. The need for representation was also mentioned in the data that both staff and external constituents would like to see more visually impaired employees within DSB, which will also illustrate awareness and success for the DSB organization. With regard to organization structure and processes, internally there are concerns about recruitment, morale, and retention. Yet, efforts are already being made to improve these concerns. The statewide transformation and interagency coordination created some new pathways that still need to be navigated. Therefore, continuing to create new or combining administrative pathways with other agencies is essential. Rehabilitation and workforce coordination with other state agencies are beneficial, so therefore, trying to figure out how to navigate dual caseloads. There is a great desire across all categories for autonomy and specialization for blind and visually impaired individuals. This is showing a general desire not to be combined with ARS because the needs of individuals are so specific and specialized, that DSB should remain autonomous, so consumers are getting the best quality of service. With regard to organizational structure and processes, DSB leadership and administration services are exemplary. There was a general approval of leadership and administration services that shows DSB is moving in a great direction. The impact of Covid 19 was one of the top reasons individuals found difficulties with accessing DSB services. It impacted communication with consumers and vendors, which resulted in outreach services being impacted as well. The ability to develop meaningful relationships and coordinate with other rehab and workforce state agencies was also affected.

The Covid 19 pandemic created more opportunities for remote work which increased flexibility, however, it did create some limitations in trying to develop connections and relationships in a virtual environment. Bureaucracy and paperwork increased exponentially which contributed to employee burnout so there is a need to figure out how to navigate that concern as well. There was an impact on metric numbers, which also determined some of the data that was not presented. However, any additional information and data not included in the presentation can be found in the final report.

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

OIB Report- Sandra Edwards

OIB did not have a quarterly meeting in December 2022 due to DSB statewide meeting. OIB Committee members were invited to participate.

FAIRS Update-Larry Wayland

Larry Wayland expressed gratitude for attending the DSB Statewide board meeting and discussed the significance of broadcasting AIRS radio on the Alexa app. Theresa Bertram noted that the programs for information on AIRS are being updated. Mr. Wayland mentioned that an author has been hired to read materials for AIRS broadcast. Mr. Wayland stated that publications and magazines can be found online under the National Federation of the Blind.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRC) – Tom Masseau was not present on his behalf Molly Hernandez with the Client Assistance Program (CAP) provided a report.

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.

Consumer Input:

No feedback or comments were given.

Chairman Keith Clark stated the next board meeting will be held in Little Rock, AR on March 10, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. Tyrone Williams made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Theresa Petrey seconded. The motion carried.

11:45 A.M.

ADJOURN