

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2022

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large, Board Chair

Erika Evans, At-Large

Theresa Petrey, ACB

David Henry, NFB

William “Bill” Heaston, Lions

Tyrone Williams, ASBVI

Tiffany Moore, AER

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Sandy Rowland, VFP

James Caton, ASBVI

Larry Wayland, FAIRS

Whitney Musick, AER

Sandra Edwards, OIB

Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

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: Betsy Barnes, Theresa Bertram, Megan Lamb, LaToya Baker, Jim Pearson, and Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes.

Others Present: Itto Outini, DSB consumer

Meeting Agenda Approval

Erika Evans made a motion, and William Heaston seconded the motion to approve the agenda for the meeting. The motion carried.

Board Meeting Minutes Approval-

Chairman Clark asked for approval of December 10, 2021, minutes. Theresa Petrey made a motion, and William Heaston seconded the motion to approve the December 10, 2021, minutes. 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, the DSB Board, and Chairman Keith Clark for their support this quarter. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that Chairman Keith Clark agreed to highlight DSB successes year-round. Dr. Williams-Stokes asked Shane Bronson, Vocational Rehabilitation

Counselor (VR) in the Fayetteville office to introduce consumer Itto Outini. Ms. Outini expressed how the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) provided assistance and services to her as a consumer.

GR/Maintenance of Effort- Dr. Williams-Stokes discussed the target to meet the \$1,782,112 Maintenance of Effort/Match for the Vocational Rehabilitation Grant Award. The Maintenance of Effort/Match (MOE) also includes the Vending Facility Program Set-aside funds. The Division of Services for the Blind is also on target to expend the State General Revenue (SGR) SFY 2022 funds allotted in the amount of \$1,897,471.

Indirect Cost Rate Proposal- Dr. Williams-Stokes mentioned that the fiscal team is working to finalize the Indirect Cost Rate Proposal. The proposal will be submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) for approval. The proposal is also a requirement listed in the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) issued by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

DSB Board Training- The State Agency training was held on Friday, January 28, 2022, at 10 a.m. via Zoom for the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board members. The required training was provided by the Assistant Attorney General, Nga Mahfouz. Ms. Mahfouz provided additional background and knowledge of the board member responsibilities and ethics. Dr. Williams-Stokes will update the Board when tentative dates are available for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) training. A Virtual Partner's Meeting will be held April 19-21, 2022. The meeting includes all the partners listed in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The 3-day meeting will provide updates across all programs and serve as a networking opportunity to learn more about what each partner does.

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 first quarterly update is due to Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) by April 30, 2022. A summary of updates include:

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.

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 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. During the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring review period 2017-2019 the agency did not have this process in place.

Finding 4 - Obligations and Expenditures Not Properly Assigned to Correct Period of Performance – DSB is working with Alliance to update the budget module to ensure 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 and capture non-Federal and Federal obligations and ensure expenditures are paid from the correct Federal award for the grant award period.

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 Dr. Williams-Stokes mentioned a draft is scheduled to be finalized by July 30th.

Finding 6 - Internal Control Deficiencies – Rates of Payment, Financial Reporting, and Personnel Costs- DSB is working with the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to develop effective internal controls and a 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. Dr. Williams-Stokes mentioned a draft is scheduled to be finalized by July 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. Dr. Williams-Stokes mentioned a draft is scheduled to be finalized by July 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 for the second quarterly CAP update.

Collaborative Efforts – Dr. Williams-Stokes will continue to serve as the Secretary for the National State Agencies for the Blind and the Little Rock Founders Lions Club. Both opportunities provide opportunities for the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) agency to partner at the state and national levels with organizations created to improve resources for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Many of the Division of Services for the Blind

(DSB) staff are positioned to serve as a resource to counties throughout Arkansas to get the word out about DSB.

Assistant Director's Report – Betsy Barnes

Assistant Director Barnes stated that the DSB SFY 2022 Budget Report and Expenditures for October 1, 2021, to December 30, 2021, are included in the board packet. DSB expended \$798,360.84 on Client Services and \$1,091,926.41 on Agency Operations for a total quarterly expenditure of \$1,890,287.25.

DSB has 60 employed staff or 77% of positions filled. Currently, there are 10 positions that are either advertised, conducting interviews, or pending completion of background checks or hire dates. Since our December Board meeting, staff that have joined the DSB family are Gwen Johnson, Field Services Administrative Support; Mindy Doster, Fort Smith Administrative Specialist II; Rakim Cheeks, Little Rock Pre-ETS Counselor; Velma Lewis, Pre-ETS Administrative Specialist III; Priscilla Rainwater, Rehab Counselor, El Dorado; and Barbara McElrath, Administrative Specialist III, Jonesboro office. Shea Harrell was promoted this week to Fiscal Support Supervisor. LaToya Baker is now the Human Resources Administrative Analyst. There were 3 voluntarily terminations in the Little Rock office during the quarter.

Human Resources Update

DSB has four staff enrolled in Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling programs, and one staff, Jacob Grace, completing his Internship in the Orientation and Mobility of the Blind (O&M) Master's program at UALR. One DSB staff, Angela Gray, graduated in December at UALR Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC). Currently, 7 out of 19 counselors have their CRC, and 3 staff are preparing to take the CRC exam.

Megan Lamb, Field Administrator is enrolled in the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute with San Diego State University. Two DSB staff are enrolled in the National Certified Rehabilitation Leadership Certification program with the Institute on Community Inclusion with University of Wisconsin Stout. Pre-ETS Manager, LaTasha Mays has enrolled in the University of Mississippi, Vision Specialist program.

This quarter staff will attend the Arkansas National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Partners meetings.

DSB supervisors will complete PGCS annual evaluations by the end of May 2022. Final instructions and forms from Commerce Human Resources have not been received at this time.

Field Services Administrator's Report

Dr. Megan Lamb presented the Field Administrator's report by stating Field Services Staff continues to work with the Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to address the RSA Corrective Action Plan to ensure DSB complies with and provide quality services to the consumers. Field services continues to work on the rate setting methodology and fiscal process in the case

management system with the Quality Management Technical Assistance Collaborative (QM TAC). Dr. Lamb mentioned that staff has submitted DSB policy on Supported Employment and Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) to RSA for review. Staff are also moving forward with Supported Employment Training and an apprenticeship pilot. The Pre-ETS counselor functional job description has been submitted for review with The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT-C) and work to develop guidance for the staff on milestones indicating completion for Pre-ETS services is in process. Chapter 6 of the DSB policy manual on Individual Plans for Employment has also been submitted to RSA for feedback. Field staff has implemented a new weekly report to track Draft Authorizations in the case management system. As part of this weekly review, DSB has reduced draft authorizations and no longer has any that are over 10 days old ensuring that DSB remains in compliance with fiscal regulations. Moving forward, Dr. Lamb stated that she will review each element of the state plan to find the best steps to improve performance and monitor accuracy and quality.

The Helen Keller National Center has scheduled a training for DSB Counselors and Supervisors on April 6, 2022, that will focus on Deafblind Etiologies, Communication and Work Readiness Skills, Pre-ETS services for Deafblind consumers, Work-Based Learning, and Assessments for Deafblind consumers. Staff will be able to receive CRCs for these trainings. On February 14, 2022, Field Staff attended a training from the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) on how to connect consumers with their services and on the types of services available.

Field services staff are currently planning for the Summer Field Services Meeting. Staff have submitted many great topic ideas and will continue to collaborate with the Technical Assistance Centers (TAC) to develop targeted training to address CAP findings.

Quality Assurance Report- Sherlyn Harris

Sherlyn Harris presented the Quality Assurance (QA) report. Ms. Harris stated that the Quality Assurance Unit is working to ensure that the case reviews are thoroughly examined. When findings are identified the auditors refer to policy to confirm that QA adheres to agency and federal guidelines. Documentation is required by QA to avoid any biased decisions during the process.

In December 2020, QA reported the re-advertisement of the Statistician position. Since that time, several applicants have been interviewed and management hopes to fill that position soon. Also, since the December 2020 meeting, Amy Jackson, a QA Auditor, has passed the Self-Paced AWARE System Administration and is now a Certified AWARE System Administrator. Ms. Harris congratulated Amy Jackson on completing the course.

QA is working on the February monthly stats report, the Strategic Plan, DSB's goals for Program Year 21, and continue work to revise the policies and procedure manual.

Business and Technology Administrator's Report- Jim Pearson

Jim Pearson provided a report for the Vending Facility Program (VFP). Mr. Pearson announced that most highway locations are open for business, except for the two White River sites. Sales are down about 50%. The VA site in Fayetteville is still closed, but the Federal building in Little

Rock was opened on February 28, 2022, with extra staff help and sales are increasing. Mr. Pearson stated that the Vending Facility Program has 5 vacant locations and need trainees for these locations. The locations are #005 DHS, #037 1 Capitol Mall, #68 PCCH, #074 Federal Building and #097 Revenue Department.

The Pulaski County vending machine service contract was placed on public bid and Canteen Vending was awarded the contract. The Office of State Procurement (OSP) has completed the public bid for vending machines for the Vending Facility Program (VFP) and projected delivery dates are around October 2022.

AIRS Report- Theresa Bertram

Theresa Bertram updated the DSB Board concerning Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS). Listenership numbers remain steady according to ARPBS analytics at <http://airs.aetn.org>. AIRS averages approximately 2,400 listeners a week. AETN-4 Audio is accessible on-televisions with local channels, and the platform has about 100 listeners a week. AIRS Plus, which can be reached at (844)-888-0981, has approximately 300 listeners. Newline has approximately 300 listeners signed up with 40 to 50 loyal users. Information to join Newline is on nfb.org. AIRS Radio has 278 active followers on Facebook.

AIRS Kids Radio is going strong every weekend with programming for the kids Saturday mornings, and teens programming in the evenings. AIRS has books that talks about St. Patrick.

Ms. Bertram is still working to get AIRS on streaming devices like Alexa. Currently, Ms. Bertram is meeting with several educators, and IT specialist in moving this objective forward.

Ms. Bertram thanked the FAIRS board for their feedback.

OLD BUSINESS

DSB State Plan Update-Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Williams-Stokes discussed the DSB State Plan Update. The State Plan provides a comprehensive overview of the services that DSB plan to provide with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment grant awards. The 2-year update is part of a requirement by RSA to ensure quality services are provided, reported, and evaluated as needed. Board members received an email with highlights of this information prior to the meeting.

A virtual public comment period was held on February 24, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. No additional comments were received on the updates to the State Plan. The plan is due March 15, 2022, to the federal partners.

Chairman Clark asked for approval on the state plan. William "Bill" Heaston motioned to accept the State Plan, and Tyrone Williams seconded. The motion carried.

DSB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment-Betsy Barnes

Assistant Director Betsy Barnes provided an update on DSB Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. DSB plans to contract with the UALR School of Public Affairs and their Research

Institute to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The contract will be reviewed by legislatures in May. The purpose of the Needs Assessment is to provide current and relevant information on the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This data will allow DSB to develop programs and allocate resources to address identified needs. The Needs Assessment will also establish DSB's program priorities and state plan goals. The needs assessment is completed every 5 years per federal guidelines. The assessment establishes DSB's program priorities, define DSB State Plan goals, objectives, strategies, services provided and establishes the need to develop and improve DSB programs and services. Lastly, the assessment provides public and community awareness of DSB programs and services. RSA requires DSB to identify the service needs of the following: Individuals with blindness that have not been served or who are underserved; those with most significant disabilities, including those needing supported employment; minorities with disabilities; youth and students with disabilities; and identifies those jointly served with other WIOA partners. The Needs Assessment will identify strategies to connect DSB with quality training programs; improve employment outcomes; enhance supported employment and Job Placement vendors; and improve DSB performance outcomes with credential attainment, median earnings, and sustained employment in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit. Ms. Barnes explained that the needs assessment data will include a program evaluation such as internal and external data and information, surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews, and quantitative and qualitative analysis.

NEW BUSINESS

2020 WIOA Data Results-Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Lamb discussed the RSA II. The RSA II is compiled by using the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) October 1st to September 30th. 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 \$5,562.05; diagnosis and treatment \$260,829.72; training \$545,649.87; job services \$3,800.00; transportation \$18,824.21; maintenance \$30,170.19; rehabilitation technology \$115,488.45; supported employment \$0; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$4,059.00; other services \$4,059.00; technical assistance \$395. Training category as follows: graduate college was \$33,251.53; four-year college \$213,294.87; junior college \$22,914.17; vocational \$63,186.97; on-the-job \$2,000.00; disability skills training \$79,161.23; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer's individual needs) \$102,841.10; job readiness \$29,000.00. Job services as follows: job search assistance \$0; job placement \$3,000.00; on-the-job supports time limited \$800.00.

Dr. Lamb explained that the RSA II not only outlines expenditures but identifies the specific number of actual participants who receive each service. This chart represented "paid for" services between October 1, 2021, to present in these categories. The breakdown is as follows: assessment 16; diagnosis and treatment 154; graduate college 7; four year college 37; junior college 11; vocational training 7; on-the-job training 3; disability skills training 15; miscellaneous training 18; job search assistance 0; job placement assistance 3; on-the-job

supports time limited 1; transportation 27; maintenance 13; rehabilitation technology 51; reader services 0; personal attendant services 1; other services 67; reader 0; job readiness training 4; and technical assistance 1.

Dr. Lamb presented an update on the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). She stated that the program year 2021 contains 2 quarters of data. A program year runs from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) includes: 57 with 5 secondary diploma, 1 educational functioning level 55 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, 1 training milestone, and 2 skill progression. Reported credential rate is 0% per RSA. For the previous year, there were 21 Measurable Skill Gains, 1 secondary diplomas, 19 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and 1 skill progression.

Program Year 2020 – 2 Quarters

- ▶ 23 Credentials
 - ▶ 2 Associate’s Degree
 - ▶ 5 Bachelor’s Degrees
 - ▶ 13 Secondary Diplomas
 - ▶ 2 Vocational/Technical Certificates
 - ▶ 1 other Recognized Diploma, Degree, or Certificate

Employment Rate PY2020

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 78 Participants
 - ▶ Employment Rate (78/340) is 22.9%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 14 Participants
 - ▶ Employment Rate (14/356) is 3.9%
- ▶ Retention PY2020 (36/78) is 46.2%

Employment Rate PY2021

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit – 33 Participants
 - ▶ Employment Rate (33/198) is 16.7%
- ▶ 4th Quarter After Exit – 50 Participants
 - ▶ Employment Rate (50/226) is 22.1%
- ▶ Retention PY2021 (19/33) is 57.6%

Median Wages PY2020

- ▶ At Exit - \$13.27 per hour
- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$7,116.69/quarter or (\$14.83 per hour)

Median Wages PY2021

- ▶ At Exit - \$13.93 per hour

- ▶ 2nd Quarter After Exit - \$5,263.50/quarter (\$14.83 p/hour)

Program Outcomes

- ▶ VR Program Year 2020 Closures (July 1, 2020 – June 10, 2021)
 - 139 Closed-Rehabilitated
- ▶ OIB Federal Fiscal Year 2021 (October 2020-September 2021)
 - 25 Closed-Goals Met

Annual Approval of Specific Board Member Expenses (per statute)-Chairman Keith Clark*vote required

Dr. Williams-Stokes explained the reasoning behind the Board Member Expenses. Each year the DSB Board is required to make a motion and vote on expenses that are incurred due to having board meetings, travels, training, and mileage reimbursement.

Chairman Clark asked for a motion to approve the Annual Approval of Specific Board Member Expenses. David Henry motioned to accept the expenses. William “Bill” Heaston seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services Update (FAIRS)-Mr. Larry Wayland

Mr. Wayland acknowledged Theresa Bertram’s report. Mr. Wayland stated that FAIRS is wanting to increase participation in listeners on Newline. 360 publications are available for individuals to subscribe to listen.

OIB Report- Sandra Edwards

Sandra Edwards provided an update on Older Individuals who are Blind report. The OIB met via teleconference on March 11, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will be in June via teleconference.

OIB Services and Outcomes Update

DSB is currently serving 295 individuals in the OIB program. For Federal Fiscal Year 2021, which runs from October 2020 until September 2021, DSB has received 411 referrals to the OIB program. During this year, DSB has closed 35 cases successfully. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, which began October 1, 2021, DSB has received 183 OIB referrals and closed 46 cases successfully. During this time DSB has provided many assistive technology devices and training on them, surgical and therapeutic treatment related to visual disabilities, orientation and mobility training, and transportation as needed to the consumers. Our largest service request by far is for more assistive living devices and training on how to use them, which counselors work to fill with consumers. DSB staff are now able to visit consumers in their home, making it easier to assess the needs and evaluate progress for our OIB consumers.

OIB Brochure

DSB has created a draft version of our brochure on the OIB program. The brochure's intended purpose is to share information on our services so that we can reach more OIB consumers.

Report on Quarterly Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) Activities-Mr. Tom Masseau or designee

Mollie Hernandez provided the Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) Quarterly Report. DRA currently has three case closures through the Client Assistance Program (CAP). One case was a carryover from last year and two of the cases were opened and closed since the first of the year. Ms. Hernandez mentioned that there are currently no open cases, however, there are two cases pending. DRA will be participating in the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) conference. On March 14, 2022, DRA and Community of Champion will sponsor "Pi" Day at the State Capitol that will start at 10:00 a.m.

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

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

CONSUMER INPUT

Arkansas Council of the Blind-Theresa Petrey

Erika Evans mentioned that the virtual State Convention is scheduled for August 2022. The plan for next year April 28th and 29th, 2023 to return to in-person. National Convention starts March 11, 2022, at the National level. It will address four disparities that all blind individuals face. One is audio accessibility. More information will be provided later.

National Federation of the Blind (NFB)

Board member David Henry provided the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Arkansas report. NFB next state convention will be held virtually on March 30, 2022, and April 1-2, 2022. The Zoom link can be received by contacting David Henry, or Erika Evans. NFB has had successful outcomes with the Washington Seminar which was held February 7-10, 2022. Mr. Henry mentioned that NFB is getting closer to pass an act called Access Technology Affordability Act, which will help individuals to offset the cost of accessible technology.

Chair Clarke stated that the next meeting will be held on Friday, June 10, 2022- 1:00 p.m.

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

3:00 P.M.

ADJORN