

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large, Secretary
Erika Evans, At-Large
Bill Johnson, AER
Basil Julian, Lions
Theresa Petrey, ACB
Teresa Sheeler, NFB, Board Chair
Stephanie Smith, ASBVI

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron, BVA
Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB
Larry Wayland, FAIRS

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

None

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

James Caton, ASBVI
Harold Brewer, VFP
Lisa Reynolds, AER
June Richardson, OIB

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

Governor's Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Crystal Anderson, Betsy Barnes, Theresa Bertram, Megan Lamb, Mason Murphey, Jim Pearson, and Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes.

Others Present: Dr. Charisse Childers, Director of Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, Tom Masseau, Executive Director of Disability Rights Arkansas, and Dr. Sha Anderson Arkansas Independent Living Services Executive Director.

Motion to Approve the Meeting Agenda

Basil Julian moved, and Keith Clark seconded the motion to approve the agenda for the meeting. The motion carried.

Motion to Approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting on December 11, 2020

Basil Julian moved, and Keith Clark seconded the motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting on December 2020. The motion carried.

Director's Report – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes began her Director's report by thanking the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) staff, the DSB Board, and Chairman Terry Sheeler for their support. DSB's goal this quarter was to increase efforts to serve consumers in a safe environment. Those efforts included continuing to abide by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and Governor's mandated pandemic requirements. According to Governor Hutchinson's mandate, all state employees on COVID-19 work from home leave are required to return to work by May 17, 2021. She mentioned that DSB is working with World Services for the Blind (WSB) to provide information to consumers regarding vaccination locations.

Dr. Williams-Stokes spoke about national projects that the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) sponsored through consultant outreach. American President Biden signed a COVID-19 relief bill that addressed some of DSB's most critical priorities, including funding for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). Critical priorities that the Rescue Plan Act addressed included: dedicated funding for home and community-based services that the disability community has spearheaded since the beginning of the pandemic; funding that is critical to help individuals with disabilities and older adults to remain safely in their homes rather than being forced into nursing homes and other congregate settings that faced severe COVID-19 outbreaks; \$1,400 stimulus checks, unlike stimulus checks provided in previous relief bills, adult dependents are eligible to receive these checks; and the Bill also provides nutrition and education funding and state aid.

Dr. Williams-Stokes reported on the Executive Order to Promote Access to Voting. The purpose of the executive order is to improve accessible, private, and independent voting and to improve and modernize the vote.gov website. The executive order (at the federal level) was developed to create a strategic plan outlining steps to modernize and improve the federal government's premiere source of voting-related information, vote.gov, including the accessibility of the website. The order seeks the input of affected stakeholders, including election administrators, civil rights and disability rights activists, Tribal Nations, and nonprofit groups that study best practices for using technology to promote civic engagement. A further purpose is to analyze barriers to voting for people with disabilities: evaluate and publish recommendations on the steps needed to ensure that the online Federal Voter Registration form is accessible to people with disabilities. The order directs the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in consultation with the Department of Justice, the Election Assistance commission, and other agencies – to analyze barriers to private and independent voting for people with disabilities, including access to voter registration, voting technology voting by mail, polling locations, and poll worker training.

Dr. Williams-Stokes indicated that the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education received requests for additional clarification of the definition of “competitive integrated employment,” particularly with respect to: a) the criterion of an “integrated employment location” (i.e., the integration standards for the location of the employment) in the definition of “competitive integrated employment” for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program; b) how the criterion for an integrated employment location in the definition affects a VR program participant’s ability to exercise informed choice. DSB will revise the language decided upon in the competitive integrated employment policy to ensure the language aligns with federal regulation.

Dr. Williams-Stokes mentioned that the Spring Council of State Agencies for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Council for State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) virtual conferences will occur in April and May of 2021. The National State Rehabilitation Council (NSRC) meeting will be held in conjunction with those meetings. Board members are encouraged to participate. The agenda has not been released.

The DSB staff continued efforts to improve their organizational structure for the quarter. As the administrators provide updates, the updates will demonstrate the productivity that happens every day within the Division. Dr. Williams-Stokes reported that she is pleased with the outcomes of the policy revisions, quality assurance, and efforts to increase the type of services provided for consumers. DSB hopes that as the numbers for COVID-19 decrease to allow staff to get back to face-to-face with consumers to help meet the desired employment goal. She announced that Crystal Anderson, DSB QA Manger, is leaving DSB the following week.

Assistant Director’s Report- Betsy Barnes

(Included in the board packet is the SFY 2021 Budget Report and Expenditures for October 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020). DSB expended \$831,067 in Client Services and \$999,427 in Agency Operations for a total Quarter expenditure of \$1,830,494.26. All the allocations for FFY 2021 have been released by RSA.

DSB has 59 employed staff or 76% of positions filled. Since the December Board meeting, staff that joined DSB are Marsha Hays, Little Rock Counselor, and DSB welcomed back Kena Sabb Monday as Fiscal Support Supervisor. DSB has 11 staff working from home with all staff to return no later than May 17th. DSB has 15 positions in the process of being filled. Three positions have pending background checks. Three positions have been advertised. Nine positions are in the process of being advertised. Supervisors will conduct the PGCS’s – annual evaluations in the following month for all staff.

All DSB staff are required to take Ethics I and II during the year's evaluation period as part of their Professional Development Plan (PDP). Staff used the opportunity to take advantage of other trainings offered online. DSB has 3 employees enrolled in Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling programs, and one enrolled in Orientation and Mobility of the Blind (O&M) program at UALR. Two were scheduled to graduate in 2021, and one applied to take the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor's (CRC) exam. Going forward, DSB plans to develop a new leadership training with UA Currents.

Ms. Barnes stated that she was honored to serve on a new steering committee with VisionServe Alliance – Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition. The coalition focuses on comprehensive specialized vision loss rehabilitation to include low vision services, aging services, and healthcare. VisionServe Alliance's purpose is to meet the unique challenges of the combined experiences of vision loss and aging by working together to advance research, policy, and funding. The alliance will focus on vision issues that were absent from national aging and healthcare policies; the need for more education on Aging and Vision Loss; inadequate and inequitable programmatic public funding; limited Medicare and Medicaid coverage; and lack of accessible transportation, housing, and information.

Ms. Barnes reported that she also serves on the CSAVR Operations and Personnel Committee. DSB was one of four states participating in the Recruitment and Retention research project with George Washington University (GWU). GWU developed a survey for DSB to use.

Field Administrator's Report

Dr. Megan Lamb presented the Field Administrator's presentation with a report on training. Field staff completed numerous trainings from the National Training and Resource Center to provide guidance with services to Older Blind individuals. All staff were required to take Ethics I and II from this site as part of our performance evaluations. In addition, supervisors and counselors were allowed to attend additional training as time allowed.

On Sunday, March 7th, the new OIB policy manual began the 30-day public comment period for promulgation. The comment period is through April 5th and the manuals are posted on the DSB website. This step moves us much closer to being able to implement these policies. Once promulgation is complete, the final copies of the new policies will be distributed to all staff.

AIRS Update – Theresa Bertram

Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) Director. Theresa Bertram provided an update on the streaming service. She reported that during the time of the pandemic, AIRS radio maintained active listeners which gradually improved since COVID-19. According to AETN analytics, the number remained consistent with 2400 listeners per week. The website airs.aetn.org has been updated without the use of Flash software, which is no longer supported. The AIRS partnership with the PBS engineers is doing well, and PBS is prepared to link AIRS up for streaming service. AETN-4 audio has approximately 100 listeners per week; AIRS plus has almost 300 listeners; NEWSLINE has near 300 listeners with about 40 to 50 users signed up. The AIRS Radio home page was at 276 likes on Facebook. Ms. Bertram encouraged Facebook users to visit and “like” the AIRS page. She indicated that AIRS Radio is focused on programs to help users with local news and articles. Those articles help consumers navigate through the pandemic with programs like Arkansas Health and Arkansas Community while providing entertainment to help lift spirits with Arkansas Travel and Arkansas Folklore. You do not have to sign up for the service, but you do have to call (884)888-0981 for the NEWSLINE service to access the newspapers including 19 local publications. She indicated that the plan is to keep many favorites like iBUG (iOS Blind Users Group, a monthly national call-in show of a blind user’s group of Apple products. iBUG have news about Apple products and technology useful for blind users and airs on Saturdays.

Ms. Bertram thanked the Board for their support. She spoke of plans for a new program, and of “going back to their roots” to read from the papers. The major newspapers are already accessible online, but AIRS would like to include community papers like the Petit Jean Headlights and others. She thanked the FAIRS board for assistance provided to secure newspapers. She indicated that the AIRS Kids Radio is going strong for younger listeners on Saturday morning and teen programming on Saturday evening, with readings from teen and young adult books on Thursday evenings. Volunteers of all ages are encouraged to join. Some local actors have volunteered because theatres are not showing plays during the pandemic. Blind and visually impaired consumers are encouraged to join the NEWSLINE reading service at nfb.org which is accessible and available. Ms. Bertram thanked the DSB Board and Dr. Williams-Stokes for the support to improve the AIRS program.

Business and Technology Administrator’s Report – Jim Pearson

Business and Technology Program Manager Jim Pearson provided a report for the Vending Facility Program (VFP). He stated that about 50% of the highway locations are closed at this time, one-half of those were closed due to COVID-19 and half due to the historic snowstorm that caused issues with water and sewage lines at the sites. He reported that sales were down about 50%, as well. VFP hoped to get those back online by May, but plumbers remained in short supply and the process of contracting with the highway department could slow things

down, as well. Eleven of the 12 federal sites remain closed except for the postal facility in North Little Rock. The federal government has not indicated when the sites will re-open. Sales at manned locations were down about 70% overall, due to COVID-19 issues.

The VFP has three open locations that requires a manager: #005 Department of Human Services (DHS) in Little Rock, #068 Pulaski County Court House in Little Rock, and #097 State Revenue Department in Little Rock. All three were vending machine operation only. VFP management is working to recruit 3 trainees for these sites immediately.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) required the VFP to make many changes in the policy and procedures and to ensure active participation by the managers for completing the policy revisions at each quarterly committee meeting. Congress passed a bill to provide \$20 million nationwide to the Randolph-Sheppard programs with the goal to provide for losses caused by the pandemic. The plan is to move forward with the stimulus payments to vending managers after RSA provides technical assistance to process the award. Arkansas was awarded \$156,775.00 for the program, based on the previous year's annual report. Funds left over may be used for VFP program expenses and must be expended by September 30, 2021. Mr. Pearson stated that the plan is to get all the sites open for business within six to eight weeks as permitted.

The DSB Technology Lab continues to provide services by phone and process referrals and recommendations. The lab averages 6 consumer recommendations per month. Staff look forward to getting back to face-to-face operations which helps to evaluate clients and ease the clients' minds when instructing and demonstrating technology.

Dr. Williams-Stokes commented that the Access Technology Affordability Act of 2021 passed under the sponsorship of US Senator John Boozman. The Act provides more access to adapted computers text and speech, screen access software, and electronic Braille displays. This act includes computers, tablets, and phones with digital access to content. The Act was passed on February 12, 2021.

Chairman Sheeler added that the Arkansas affiliate of NFB worked with Senator John Boozman and have a great relationship with the Senator to bring awareness to issues related to blindness. She added that the Senator is an ophthalmologist and understands how blindness impacts a person. This was Bill HR431 and Senate Bill 212, as of Feb 12th has 47 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and 11 sponsors in the Senate.

OIB Advisory Council Report – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Megan Lamb presented the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Advisory Council Report. Staff completed Technical Assistance from the OIB-Technical Assistance Center (TAC) October 2020. The TAC provided numerous trainings to staff, worked on the OIB policy, and updated the low vision kits issued to each area as part of this process. The OIB policy is currently posted for public comment on the DSB webpage. DSB counselors and supervisors were provided a full day of training on how to use the low vision kits and new items were ordered in October. DSB counselors and supervisors received an updated Low Vision Kit with new items as recommended by OIB TAC and replaced items in need of repair. The kits are set up to allow staff to demonstrate products and work with consumers to determine specific needs. The training by the OIB Technical Assistance Center was designed to ensure staff knew how to use the kits to conduct these demonstrations and evaluations.

OIB Referrals – Dr. Megan Lamb

Since January 2020, DSB has received 421 OIB referrals for services. We currently have 186 open OIB cases. The OIB program receives consumer referrals from local partners who may be providing services to these individuals, or the Independent Living Center. Three consumers have completed the OIB program with a successful outcome. COVID-19 slowed the progress for many OIB consumers as many required in-home trainings and not all consumers or vendors are comfortable having someone in-home at this time. Counselors worked with OIB vendors to ensure services were available via in-home or through virtual visits. Services provided include assistive technology, orientation & mobility, and technology training to consumers. Recently counselors developed a strong referral relationship with the Low Vision Clinic at UAMS and receive referrals often.

2020 WIOA Data Results – Crystal Anderson

RSA II Report – Crystal Anderson

Crystal Anderson spoke about the data as it relates to both programmatic and financial information. Ms. Anderson stated that the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) is from October 1 through September 30 of the following year. The data presented today encompasses the period from October 1, 2020 though today.

Ms. Anderson presented the Independent Living Center expenses from October 1, 2020, to present; VR expenses for World Services for the Blind (WSB) -\$170,931.16; Alphapointe \$0; Louisiana Center for the Blind - \$39,900.00; WSB Pre-ETS DSB -\$0; and OIB expenses for WSB were \$5,225.00. The outcomes of these expenses were as follows: WSB VR has 14 participants

with open cases; Louisiana Center for the Blind has an outcome of two participants with open cases; WSB OIB has a result of one participant with a closed (goal met) case.

For the same period of October 1, 2020, to present, the expenses by service category were as follows; assessment was \$4,262.86; diagnosis and treatment \$253,339.19; training (including college and on-the-job training) \$476,501.96; job services \$15,747.00; transportation \$3,545.52; maintenance \$11,718.00; rehabilitation technology \$134,929.44; supported employment \$0; reader services \$0; personal attendant services \$2,754.00; other services \$308,613.95; technical assistance \$0. Training category is as follows: graduate college was \$14,465.85; four-year college \$209,848.28; junior college \$38,408.03; vocational training \$76,836.52; on-the-job training \$1,000.00; disability skills training \$57,239.00; and, miscellaneous (costs that were more specific to the consumer's individual needs) \$78,704.28. Ms. Anderson used separate categories to explain job services: on job search assistance \$4,497.00; job placement \$11,000.00; and on-the-job supports time limited \$250.

Participants Receiving Each Service – Crystal Anderson

Ms. Anderson 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, 2020 to present in these categories. The breakdown went as follows: assessment 19; diagnosis and treatment 156; graduate college 2; four-year college 52; junior college 11; vocational training 10; on-the-job training 1; disability skills training 8; miscellaneous training 8; job search assistance 2; job placement assistance 5; on-the-job supports time limited 1; transportation 16; maintenance 7; rehabilitation technology 55; personal attendant services 1 and other services 62.

Programmatic WIOA Performance Measures – Crystal Anderson

Ms. Anderson presented an update on the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). She stated that the WIOA has six common performance measures. A program year runs from July 1st to June 30th of the following year. The data reported here was from the first two quarters of Program Year 2020 (PY20), which extends from July 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. The Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) includes: 43 with one secondary diploma, 41 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts, and one training milestone. This measure was in comparison to 45 skill gains, for the same time the previous year, in which there were 26 secondary diplomas and 22 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts. For 2020, there were two credential attainments: one associate degree and one bachelor's degree. For the same time in 2019, there were three credential attainments: one associate degree and two bachelor's degrees. She said the numbers are close between the two programmatic years.

Dr. Megan Lamb provided an analysis of the Measurable Skills Gains (MSG) and credential attainment. DSB staff was trained on the measurable skills gains process and how to track them in AWARE. She stated that the numbers have improved though training and noted the secondary, and post-secondary, transcripts increased significantly. The outcomes demonstrated that staff are keeping better records of services provided. Most consumers graduate in May which should provide an increase in the MSG numbers during the next quarter.

WIOA Employment Rates and Wages – Crystal Anderson

Crystal Anderson presented the employment rates and wages. For the 2020 employment rate, the second quarter after exit was 60 participants. The fourth quarter after exit was not applicable because it has not occurred yet. For the second quarter rate of January through December of 2019, the employment rate for PY19, 2nd quarter after exit, 27%, or 97 participants. For the fourth quarter after exit, there were 31.4% or 125 participants. The increase showed growth between the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit for PY19. The median wages for PY20 were, at exit, \$11.75 per 40 hours per week. For the 2nd quarter after exit DSB reported \$6,352.10 per quarter (\$13.23 per hour). Median wages at exit PY 19 DSB reported a median rate of \$11 per 40 hours per week. For the 2nd quarter after exit DSB reported \$5892.21 per quarter which was an average of \$12.27 per hour. The change was a significant increase between PY19 and PY20. The numbers for program outcomes for the period of July 1, 2020 to February 28, 2021, were for VR 71 cases closed – rehabilitated, and for OIB 3 closed – goals met.

Dr. Lamb indicated that a client's employment verification is required prior to closure to have accurate performance measures. Guidance is provided on acceptable types of verification, and training regarding the types of verification acceptable is provided to staff. She stated that training was modified with COVID-19 restrictions in mind to make sure the information was valid, since face-to-face meetings with clients are less likely. DSB provided staff with guidance on electronic signatures, payment review process, closure review process, authorization trainings, and supervisor trainings to ensure quality assurance is addressed. The hope is that the quality of services improves, as performance numbers increase.

VR and OIB Consumer Satisfaction Survey Process – Crystal Anderson

Crystal Anderson presented a PowerPoint presentation on the existing consumer satisfaction survey and the proposed changes to amend the process. She indicated that DSB used a survey to promote and support organizational effectiveness. Surveys are designed to quantify views, ideas, and beliefs. This process should help the organization identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. The existing process utilized mail-out (and phone surveys as requested), to be completed by the client after case closure. The pros include that this survey is

a familiar, conventional, and trusted means of collecting data. The cons are that, in the current climate, mailed surveys have a declining response rate, increased costs of money and time, and this is an outdated process. Ms. Anderson proposed that DSB switch to online surveys (and mail/phone surveys as requested), sent throughout the case and after case closure. The pros with this would be lower costs, current real-time information, and an increasing response rate. This type of survey would be pro-active. The cons for online surveys are limited to consumers with technology access and would require basic computer skills. Microsoft Office 365 has a feature called "Microsoft Forms". This feature allows creation of and customization of forms.

Annual Approval of Board Member Expenses – Terry Sheeler

Approval for travel expenses for board members to conferences national and statewide is required annually. Keith Clark moved to accept this approval. The motion was seconded by Basil Julian. A vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Correlations Between Pre-ETS and VR – Crystal Anderson

Ms. Anderson reported on the correlations between the Pre-Employment Transition Service and Vocational Rehabilitation progression, as examined by the Quality Assurance department of DSB. The purpose of the program was to look at updated ways to evaluate programs, whether at the programmatic or fiscal level, and use the results to increase program effectiveness. The problem Ms. Anderson chose to study in Performance Evaluation Quality Assurance (PEQA) was the correlation between Pre-ETS services and VR progression. Ms. Anderson stated that she reviewed the Student Transitional Youth Learning Experience (STYLE) program data as the focus of the project. STYLE was created by World Services for the Blind (WSB) to serve Pre-ETS consumers using modules to deliver instruction. The project was designed to measure the return on investment for the program, evaluate the actual outcomes of STYLE, and to identify if there was an actual relationship between participation in STYLE and VR progression.

Ms. Anderson indicated that her research design was a quantitative study of descriptive data. The target population was 208 students with disabilities. 43 of the students were STYLE participants, of these 22 were female, 15 were male, and 3 chose not to self-identify; 25 were white, 16 were non-white (10 black), and 3 chose not to self-identify; 25 were from Little Rock and 18 were from other areas of Arkansas. Her data collection technique included AWARE-generated reports, exported to EXCEL and analyzed with IBM's SPSS software.

Ms. Anderson reported her overall results as follows: a) no positive correlation between participation between the STYLE program and participation in ongoing VR services; b) there was no positive correlation between participation in the STYLE program and rehabilitation closure

from the VR program; c) there was no positive correlation between completion of the STYLE program and participation in the VR services; but, d) there were potential correlations between demographical factors and VR progression, specifically as it relates to closure. She further indicated : a) participation in the STYLE program and ongoing participation in the VR program – 27.9% of STYLE participants remained in the VR program, compared to 39.4% of non-STYLE participants who remained in the VR program (more people who have not participated in STYLE remained in the VR program); b) participation the STYLE program and rehabilitated closure from the VR program – 0% of STYLE participants who closed from the VR program were closed rehabilitated, 16% of non-STYLE participants who closed from the VR program were closed rehabilitated; c) demographic factors (gender, race, and location) for STYLE participants and progression in the VR program – 84% of male STYLE participants closed “other than rehabilitated” from the VR program; 60% of female STYLE participants closed, “other than rehabilitated” from the program (70.8% of White STYLE participants closed “other than rehabilitated” from the VR program; 81.2% of non-White STYLE participants closed “other than rehabilitated” from the VR program; 56% of STYLE participants from the Little rock /region closed “other than rehabilitated” from the VR program; and, 93.3% of STYLE participants from other areas of the state closed “other than rehabilitated” from the VR program.

Ms. Anderson suggested that there should be a better integration of Pre-ETS and VR services; field staff should take more time looking at the interactions between those two programs to make sure the Pre-ETS services are actually embedded in the VR services. There may be some cultural considerations regarding the differences between urban and rural locations for these consumers.

Comments

Dr. Williams-Stokes commented that many of the problems listed in Ms. Anderson’s project were addressed during the current program year. Dr. Lamb commented that VR counselors will continue the relationships with the Pre-ETS students as the case is transferred to VR. DSB administration realized that the Pre-ETS counselor is more familiar with the students and families to work with them individually and in a group dynamic. DSB worked with the students to aid with required activities to move through the program. DSB also works to improve the quality of services available to consumers. She noted that Ms. Anderson and her team worked hard to improve the accuracy of the information provided from the QA reports, and being aware of progress towards outcomes will help to improve the process. Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked WSB Director Sharon Giovinazzo, and WSB for their support and participation in this process. DSB partnered with WSB to reach the Pre-ETS students.

FAIRS Update – Mr. Larry Wayland

Larry Wayland provided his report on the Friends of Arkansas Information Radio Services (FAIRS). Mr. Wayland stated that Theresa Bertram provided a good report on the state of AIRS, and he did not have much to add. He reiterated that FAIRS is in the process of adding additional newspapers for the broadcast.

OLD BUSINESS

Promulgation of the New Policy Manual – Dr. Megan Lamb

The 30-day public comment period began on Sunday, March 7th to cover 6 chapters of the VR policy manual that were approved by the DSB Board and the new OIB manual. The comment period is open until April 5th and the manuals are posted on the DSB website. This step moved them much closer to being able to implement these policies. The final copies of the new policies will be distributed to all staff after promulgation was complete. The public hearing took place on March 11th at 10:00 am. No comments were received during the comment period.

Deafblind Project – Dr. Megan Lamb

Field staff are working with the Helen Keller National Center on a pilot project to support Deafblind consumers. Pre-ETS staff are working with staff from Helen Keller and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) to create a joint program to allow DSB and ARS to serve deafblind students. All DSB Pre-ETS counselors have a consumer in the program either as a VR eligible, or potentially eligible, consumer.

Procedure Updates – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Lamb reported that she worked with the Area Managers and the QA Steering Committee to provide updated guidance, directives, and support to field staff. The hope is that the changes and clarifications will ensure that DSB's practices align with federal regulations and decrease barriers. Clarification on the employment verification requirements were disseminated to all staff the week of this meeting to include training resources. The Closure Review Process was updated to address concerns expressed by staff and will be distributed in the next few weeks. A draft of Chapter 6 of the updated policy and procedures manual has been edited for feedback from the Technical Assistance Center. Drafts of additional policies will move through the process before being considered final and submitted to the DSB Board.

Independent Living – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Lamb reported that she worked with the local offices to identify independent living items needed in each region. The goal was to ensure items were updated throughout the year to ensure the funds available are expended timely.

New Business

OIB Committee Report – Mr. Keith Clark

Mr. Keith Clark reported that he did not have anything to add to the OIB report given earlier in the meeting.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Tom Masseau

Tom Masseau, Executive Director of Disability Rights Arkansas provided a report. He stated that due to COVID-19 the call load decreased at DRA. DRA received five service requests from individuals who are visually impaired, or blind. He also reported that DRA has followed the legislative session and made sure the disability community received attention in terms of supports and services available across the state. Also, DRA has monitored the voting bills as they are introduced across the state.

Arkansas Statewide Independent Living Council (ARSILC) – Dr. Sha' Anderson

Arkansas Statewide Independent Living Council (ARSILC) Executive Director, Sha' Anderson provided her report. Dr. Anderson added a comment to the discussion of the “stand your ground” law, she mentioned that black and indigenous people of color, who are blind, might have a further stigma if the individual walk up to the wrong house. She mentioned that there are several voting rights bills in legislation. Bill HB1002, is a resolution the continued the collaboration between health care providers, law enforcement, and the community as it relates to abuse of prescription medication. She mentioned that Arkansas is number one in opioid abuse. ARSILC noticed bill sponsors did not put in the language as it applies to people with disabilities. Dr. Anderson said she met with and educated Representative Justin Boyd and Senator Ben Gilmore, the lead sponsors, to add the language to the bill. People with disabilities are two to four times more likely to suffer from substance abuse disorders than the general population. She also mentioned that on March 8th the Governor added people with disabilities to the group getting the COVID-19 vaccine. Dr. Anderson indicated that she is on the FEMA integration team and that FEMA will donate money to Arkansas so that everyone will have the opportunity to receive the vaccine. Dr. Anderson said that she served on the homeless coalition and getting them vaccinated was a real concern, as was the likelihood that the trauma of being homeless can make people more likely to become addicted to drugs. Dr. Anderson is also on the NCIL Voting Rights Subcommittee (National Council on Independent Living), an organization whose mission is to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the electoral process in order to maximize our ability to affect federal, state, and local political priorities. The NCIL worked with Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota) and Robert Casey (D-Pennsylvania), who introduced a bill to remove the barriers to voting for seniors and people with disabilities. She

announced ARSILC will sponsor a day at the Capitol in May, virtually, where people with disabilities will have the ability to share COVID-19 experiences and share artwork of pictures of the Capitol. She thanked Dr. Williams-Stokes for the opportunity to share her news.

Consumer Input

Arkansas Council of the Blind – Theresa Petrey

Board member Theresa Petrey reported that the Arkansas Council of the Blind (ACB) held their virtual State Convention in January. She mentioned that most of their state meetings have been conference calls. ACB Arkansas plans to hold the state affiliate convention in August as a virtual meeting through Zoom. She also reported that on March 17, 2021, ACB National has a conference call to share information with others especially technology. She started the “Tips and Trips Around the House”, giving advice to the blind using appliances, recipe swaps, etc. On Tuesday evenings Paul Edwards, from Florida, has a show called “Tuesday Topics”. ACB Arkansas decided to do host the convention to focus on the ACB platforms like ACB Radio that can be accessed with a Victor Reader Stream or a smart device using Alexa. The program will be available in August. Only one chapter met, which was over a conference call line, this was the local Quasar. Rita Reese Whiting, the State President, joined them. One member, Linda Yak, encouraged participation of all at-large members to start a call because, even without a pandemic going on, some ACB members do not have a chapter of their own to attend meetings. In February, ACB members usually go to Washington D.C. for a legislative seminar. This year members used Zoom to participate. There were seminars on transportation, fund-raising, and other topics including exercise. Ms. Petrey noted that obesity is rampant in the blindness community. Even without a pandemic member do not have many opportunities to go to a gym. Leslie Spoon, from Orlando, offered daily virtual exercise classes to help keep blind people fit and with balance issues, cardio, and other issues. Barbara Duncan passed away in February. A memorial service is scheduled for Saturday, March 27th, at 10:00 am at the Village Creek Baptist Church. Ms. Duncan worked for the Governor’s office for 35 years, and WSB, when it was AEB (Arkansas Enterprises for the Blind).

NFB Update – Terry Sheeler

The local affiliate for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) held a Washington seminar for 2021. The affiliate met virtually with their representatives in Arkansas. In addition to the Accessibility Technology Act discussed earlier in this meeting, there were three other initiatives: The Medical Device Non-Visual Accessibility Act, Twenty-First Century Mobile App and Web Site Accessibility Act, and the Americans with Disability Voting Rights Act. The meeting was held met virtually and many members participated. Ms. Sheeler announced that the NFB national convention is scheduled for July 6- July 11, 2021 and will be held virtually. Tuesday, July 6th is

the seminar and social meeting day; Wednesday, July 7th is the board meeting with resolutions; Thursday, July 8th is the division meeting and opening ceremonies, Friday, July 9th is the presidential report and general session, and Saturday, July 10th is the business session and banquet. Cost is free but registration is required at NFB.org.

DSB Director’s Evaluation – Terry Sheeler

Ms. Sheeler reminded the executive board members there would be an ARS State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting on Thursday March 18th, at 9:30 to 11:30 am. Also, the Board normally does the evaluation for the DSB Director after the March meeting. She noted that the Board has asked for the paperwork to complete the Director’s evaluation. She did share with members that a response was received from the Attorney General’s office to the opinion letter written by Stephen Porch. The Attorney General’s email wrote that the evaluation of the Commissioner [DSB Director] does lie with the Chair of this Board. The evaluation paperwork was supposed to be available to them no earlier than April 1, 2021. In reference to an earlier email Chair Sheeler sent to the Board, the board will call a special meeting to complete the DSB Director’s evaluation. The evaluation paperwork was not received prior to this meeting.

Dr. Williams-Stokes commented that the final dates have not been received from Human Resources, but the PGCS process for this rating year must be completed by the end of June. Dr. Charisse Childers can provide more information to the Board when it becomes available.

Next Meeting – Terry Sheeler

Chairman Sheeler announced the next scheduled DSB Quarterly Board Meeting will be Friday, June 11, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. This may be scheduled as virtual meeting on the Zoom platform. She also noted that the NCSRC would be virtual. Many board members have attended in the past, and she encouraged all board members to attend this year. Board members will need to register, and Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes would provide registration information as it becomes available.

Chairman Sheeler asked for a motion to adjourn. Basil Julian motioned to adjourn the meeting. Bill Johnson seconded. The meeting was adjourned.