

Advisory Committee for the Blind of Pennsylvania
Quarterly Meeting
Harrisburg BBVS District Office
Forum Place
555 Walnut Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg PA 17101
May 24, 2016
Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present

Joe Drenth, Chair
David De Notaris
Joe Strechay
Carlton Cook-Walker
Arnold Bowser
Rod Alcidonis
Dr. Marianne Boltz
Donna Reinaker

Public Attendees

Nicole Wade
Ruth Lotz
Susan Neff
Keri Seitz
Ally Wullbrandt
Justin (Gus) Laffey
Elaine Welch
John Horst, Director of Community Affairs
Marsha Drenth
Natalie Barbush
Nanette Korn
Angelina Cruz
Shelly Faust-Jones
Jennifer Wertz
Steve Suroveic
Carol Bowser

Chairman Joe Drenth welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introductions we given.

Mr. Suroveic

- David and Steve co-chairing on work group for Executive Order 2016-03, signed by Governor Wolf on March 10, 2016. The executive order

does make employment first a policy of the executive branch. This means that employment is the first consideration and preferred outcome of any publically funded training program for working age adults. However this is not the only consideration or outcome.

- Must be a job that pays minimum wage or better and must be in a setting that's intergraded. (working with people without disabilities)
- We want to make PA a model state when it comes to being hospitable to workers with disabilities. Departments of Human Recourses, Labor and Industry, General Services and other agencies as necessary should come together and develop a plan.
 - Plan should be done within 120 days. We will get stakeholder input for the plan. There is a public comment period through May 31.
 - There will be several factors used to measure progress
 - The number of people out of high school with paid work experience.
 - Labor participation rate 65-75 with 5% unemployment rate
 - The number of people in long term support program.
 - The number of private sector businesses who ask for help and get help from OVR.
 - Office of Admin will identify barriers to hiring and retaining people with disabilities to state government. DGS, DOT also part of work group.
 - Survey monkey survey to 60,000 and got 200 responses

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- Have you looked at number of kids going to college or training center? If kid graduates HS and doesn't get job because of college that's good!

Mr. De Notaris

- We would love to hear ideas we are not doing that could help people get jobs

Mr. Alcidonis

- Fear when applying for competitive employment, fear of drafting a visual pleasing resume so that its not initially apparent that someone with visual impairment. Have a template/webpage for resumes that's visually pleasing

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- Not teaching any skills. Need mini training centers.
- Mentoring- have multiple mentors

Ms. Reinaker

- Are there things that being blind would give an advantage where being sighted would be disadvantage

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- Most jobs are grocery store/fast food. Would be great to have kids go to BEP vendors. Number 1 factor in getting a job after school is employment history not grades. Creates successful work ethic and BEP vendors have so much knowledge to share with children.

Ms. Reinaker

- Volunteer experience helps too.

Mr. Alcidonis

- Plan needs to be orientated in such a way these individuals are encouraged and given a portal to search for jobs. Need accessible system. 508 compliant

Mr. Suroveic

- Comments can be sent to RA-PWemploymentfirst@pa.gov or 625 Forster St. 330-c Harrisburg, PA 17120

Ms. Reinaker

- Will there be a website that you will provide a draft?

Mr. Suroveic

- Probably not due to the timeline

Ms. Welch

- Integrated employment should be preferred outcome. In PA, one member agency that pays well over minimum wage. What happens when a customer says that's really where I want to work? How to deal with that when policy is different?

Mr. Suroveic

- We are not trying to stop anything just trying to promote. Executive Order is trying to move system in a direction. Many people who are not working at all. Order is about helping those 20% who want to work and to increase that percent. Not about saying what you're doing over here isn't good enough. Some of those settings will continue to operate. Trying to say "here is the vision the direction we are trying to work toward"

Ms. Welch

- Customer out there who have expressed an interest to work there but the government will not fund

Mr. Horst

- Deals with people who have gone through process but don't hear from counselor. When placement comes, there is an absence there. Stay with a person until they get the job

Ms. Elaine Welch-president PAB

- Founded in 1910. Only statewide organized service provider in the nation but doing some consulting with Florida and they have started a membership organization
- 26 organizations that employ 1872 people
- PAB has a \$2.5 million contract with the commonwealth
- Limited services under contract
- Support services- helping read mail, pay bills, essential services like check writing
- Quality of life
- Ancillary case management
- Some transportation
- Customer choice is a big issue – we have people who come in and would like to use low vision devices and they want to learn. If somebody wants to learn those skills, we would like to teach them rather than doing it for them. Trying to offer those services who come into organization. I started in 1982 and could provide O&M, housing and services that BBVS teaches. Our standards and requirements are more stringent than those for the commonwealth. We have not gotten a single referral from BBVS within the past years. We've referred several thousand people to BBVS. The majority of the people we serve are elderly blind people. Must say that before David De Notaris, not many. A lot of people that don't fit in the mold of older blind or children. Like to work more closely with BBVS to make sure those people are served would be a huge return on investment. In our proposal this year, we had in 1974 we had 1.48 million until 2003. Now, we get 470,000 but have to add 800,000 on a contract of 1.6 million. Had to reduce our deliverables but 14-18,000 kids won't be screened this year due to lack of money. How do we assure the follow-up? That they're getting eye exams that they failed screening. Follow-up is extremely important part. Open case and over a period of 90 days and follow up and see if it's possible to get results. Helps to measure accuracy of our program. Gauge success internal this way. Follow-up is challenging with older adults because there are a lot of services available but are still out there trying to regroup. Often

times, older adults opt out – with children too. They don't know us and we can't work through preschools to get that information. Need for adult vision screening going down. Consider successful closure if child has seen eye doctor. PAB only screens preschool age 2-6. Department of Health and Department of Education screen school age children

- 100% of money PAB receives for specialized services goes directly to agency.

Mr. Bowser

- 1872 how many are certified blind people?

Ms. Welch

- More than half of them. Not all employees are visually impaired. High level staff members are blind/visually impaired. Huge disparity in the agencies in the array of services they provide.

Mr. Bowser

- Out of those agencies, how many of those agencies are running a facility to employ

Ms. Welch

- Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Cambria County, Westmoreland, Washington green. Probably almost half of them Westmoreland and Cambria do still have programs through DHS that pay below minimum wage. All the rest of industrial programs that pay above minimum wage and benefits.

Mr. Bowser

- How many are hiring non sighted ID individuals?

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- What percent are making subminimum wage?

Ms. Welch

- We do not believe that blind people should receive subminimum wage.

Mr. Alcidonis

- Do you not have access or lack of proactiveness?

Ms. Welch

- If I need to get that information for specialized services that would be available

Mrs. Drenth

- I wonder how many of those elderly folks would qualify that my program could support? It would be interesting to get that information out. As our population ages, our elderly have visual and hearing loss

Ms. Welch

- Pittsburgh has a very robust program who serve deaf blind people. We have an annual conference coming up in October and would be excellent for you and I, Marsha, to get together to hear the kinds of

services you can provide which will segway into another thing we have been working on. One of the things that came up is collaboration with other agencies so having you come and talk about that would be a step in the right direction. Collecting information on the local level and see where we would be able to partner so they have access to resources. We created a statewide computer network. Once a month, we do meetings via skype for business. Access technology... how do we develop a program? Opportunities with BBVS or private? How do we get people the access they need? We are a community partner and we would like to work more closely but I will say some outreach would be nice. I don't get notices of these meetings with procedural memos. How do we communicate better? Instead of just saying we are community members.

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- How many kids (ages 2-6) are BBVS qualified?

Ms. Welch

- Screenings help to ID issues that can be corrected or prevented. Only 3 cases were true referrals that were not pre identified and could not be corrected.

Mr. Bowser

- What is the chance of PAB agencies that would give students chance to develop resumes and to gain skills? PAB people could do a great service but would at least give them an opportunity to develop work ethic and work skill

Ms. Welch

- We would be helping blind students a lot better than putting them in blind industries. I believe that people should have a choice. Some of my agencies have been working with Joe, providing job shadowing that hire professional employees and the ones that are blind. I would push for it.

Mr. De Notaris

- Doing OJT and paying people to provide summer, weekend, evening experiences to do those things like job shadowing, press releases, helping coordinate support groups and there is opportunity with 26 separate businesses and your central office to offer work based experiences.

Ms. Welch

- I will do it at the PAB level if we can work something out. Only four of us there and we are all sighted. We do have a blind employee that we could employ on a contract basis.

Mrs. Cook-Walker

- Tech needs is high school and college students.

Ms. Welch

- In terms of intervention, not an area. Let the state do it. Weaknesses and how we interact – work more closely and make sure we do refer back and forth. Social workers do come across people who don't fit in those

Ms. Neff

- tracking referrals, over 431 that have been tracked

Dr. Boltz

- Seeing infants every day and want to get the word out to get about infant see program. Screening programs but regularly see children slipping through the cracks.

Mr. Alcidonis

- Choice. Can you share with us what the process is by which the customers have shared with you that they prefer this versus that? Are they getting both of the systems by which they would make that choice to choose which type of employment?

Ms. Welch

- A customer's ability to choose what they want to do with their lives and how they want to pursue it and there are very well laid out guidelines that came out 2001 how states will implement customer choice.

Mr. Alcidonis

- I'm talking about the individual.

Ms. Welch

- You have someone in the program that is federally funded and have a right to make a choice and have their evaluation and their counselor approves and provides these services. Some cases there is a waiting list. We will get somebody out to you and that person says they would like an O&M to provide services but are told they can't. We used to provide those services that helped make people independent but bargaining unit says services are costing the union jobs. At that point, they had to pull those services back and we were no longer able to provide these services and make these services fundable. Many people went to BBVS. We cannot provide services around bargaining unit- PAB Position is out of compliance of federal regulations.

Harrisburg success stories

Megan Bobby – Social Worker, Harrisburg District Office

- The case is an ILOB program customer who lives in Franklin County. 88 year old female. Lives alone in her own residence but her daughter and son in law live close and stop by. Great job maintaining her independence. End stage glaucoma with severe macular degeneration. Wearing glasses over 4 years old. In order for her to

see, she would have to hold objects to the side and bring them close in. Occasionally lose the object. Hard time identifying objects but was very creative. Came up with her own solutions but still seeking our services to see what she could benefit from. Enjoys all of her hobbies but couldn't always participate in them. Was unable to enjoy books anymore but we got her digital audio books. Recommending low vision therapy after looking at her eye reports. Low vision on her plan, guidance and counseling just to be support to her and her family with any issues, and information and referral. 20/100 and 10/140 with no color vision and slight peripheral vision.

Bureau reports

Mr. De Notaris

- Always enjoy being around our staff from the district office. Always nice to be around ACBP... important that we continue appointment to ACBP.
- Lots of exciting things going on within OVR. We had Steve Suroveic with First Employment Executive Order – what can we do and what can we continue to do?
- Other things suggested at other meetings were reforming the civil service process for those to complete tests for the commonwealth and making completely accessible. Other comments like that would be absolutely welcomed. Is there a centralized place that accommodation requests are managed? So they are managed in a timely manner. Last week, house bill 400 was signed and really does mirror the WIOA and puts responsibility on OVR. We are really excited about how that brings us closer to education and we're meeting with Bureau of Specialized this afternoon to discuss how we can properly report. Total of 20 million dollars of additional resources and we are investing those dollars in three different ways.
- Direct customer service providing staff time (staff do cost allocation time sheet it is coded to different funding sources or streams) allows us to maximize the resources we have
- What was the overwhelming skill attribute that employers were looking for?
- Work Ethic was #1 so how do we teach work ethic if we're not working. We have to do whatever we can do to help students and working aged adults to raise labor participation rate of individuals with disabilities. What can we do to get that number higher? What are other things that we can do in state government and private to invest

in PETS? We've put out three rounds of grant proposals and awarded around 5 million dollars but certainly can do more and would love to hear more ideas. Awesome summer initiatives happening this year. Meeting with the federal department of labor to discuss other employment initiatives that we can start that are really exciting. New Project Search at Drexel University.

- Important that everyone stay positive.

Mr. Strechay

- We are looking at all of our options. Look at what's going on around the country and in the local community. I'm travelling to Houston to learn about a program. Looking at resources at our staff in this room to bring their talent and skills and allow them to bring it to our consumers. My blindness is a feature not what defines me. We have to train our consumers to present themselves in a manner to address the elephant in the room. Looking at partnering with national organizations for weekend opportunities.

Mrs. Faust-Jones

- Thank you to everyone who is coming to career panel at Summer Academy. We've added Palmer Museum and Science U. Summer Academy will have a whole week of STEM events next year and that's new in 2017. TVI are coming for the first time. SASA has twenty returning students coming for a weekend to get them started on having their own networking group and support each other. We've gotten results of PSU impact study results, all results are better from beginning to end. Students come in with very high hopes and maintain their hopes but become more realistic about where their levels are. Parents have higher hopes after Summer Academy with what children can be doing and should be doing. Continue with paid internships.

Mrs. Drenth

- The SSP program is moving forward. Just received our 50th application and making sure that we have all of the necessary paperwork. Lots of outreach opportunities – made a presentation at AER Conference. Elections – Appointments for the advisory committee for the blind. Some terms have expired or will be expired. David would like to ask those to remain on the committee until a new appointment is confirmed.

Carlton Cook-Walker – chair

Joe Drenth – Vice Chair

MaryAnn Boltz - Secretary

These take effect on July 1st.

Next meeting in October at the Altoona office.

Recommend that we start planning Blindness Awareness Expo 2017

Any final questions or comment from anyone in the room?

Mr. Arbor

- I don't know how much of the wonderful things we hear at this meeting and the great things that are going on that the public is aware of this. To project what we are and what we are doing to the public.

Mrs. Drenth

- ACBP having a website?

Ms. Neff

- There is a webpage that describes the committee and their biographies