

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)

Conference Call

May 27, 2020

2:00 – 5:00 PM

Conference Phone: 888-585-9008

Conference Room#: 319 035 377

Chair Mikey Wiseman Kelly called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. He welcomed everyone and called for introductions.

Council Members Present:

Mikey Wiseman, Robert Doyle, Paul Edwards, Kim Carr, Denise Valkema, Misty Porter

DBS Staff

Bridget Giles, Marian Rezkallah

Council Staff

Selena Sickler

Former Members Waiting on Reappointment

Tracie Inman, Jorge Hernandez, Howard Bell

Adoption of Agenda

Paul Edwards made a **motion** to accept the agenda with the addition of the topic of writing a letter to the Governor. Denise seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mikey recognized members of the public.

Director's Report

Robert Doyle presented his report.

He recognized DBS field staff and in the state office as well as CRP's for their continued work to serve clients during the pandemic.

DBS has not performed face to face services with clients due to COVID19.

DBS has approximately 98% of its employee's teleworking. DBS has implemented and deployed softphone technologies in order to communicate directly with clients from their home computer.

The State has implemented a hiring freeze and a travel freeze about a month ago.

The DBS budget for next year has been passed by the legislature but it has not gone to the Governor. DBS is planning for contingencies regarding a freeze on travel and hiring.

As of today, there is no definitive date as to when the DBS offices will be open to the public. It could be potentially June 1.

DBS will reopen in phases. Clients will be brought into the office by appointment only while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Thermometers have been sent to the District Offices and everyone entering the office will have their temperature checked – both employees and clients. Screenings will be performed. Masks will be used when working with clients.

DBS has recently received updated guidance from RSA regarding flexibility with the referral and application process and electronic signatures. Director Doyle will send them to Selena.

DBS is looking at implementing alternative technologies as we move forward with opening our offices and striking a balance between face to face meetings with clients and telework.

RSA has been in touch with DBS about making amendments to the State Plan. A follow-up call is pending regarding updates to the plan.

DBS is working to provide relief to our Better Business Enterprise Operators. Many operators have been dealing with food spoilage and lower sales. DBS has suspended the "Set Aside Program". RSA is not making any waivers to policy or procedures.

DBS has held weekly meetings with CRP's to strategize on how to continue to deliver services during this time as well as when DBS starts to open. The goal of DBS is to have a strong network and communication with the CRP's in order to deliver services to clients.

DBS has waived financial consequences for state funded program for our CRP's for the months of March and April. May has not been decided upon. DBS is looking to possibly use the hours expended on activities as time spent on service delivery in order to reduce the financial consequence.

DBS General Data for all Vocational Rehab Services in terms of actual services provided as of May 11.

- 13% decline in actual services provided
- 40% decline in the frequency of services provided
- 26% decrease in the number of people applying for services
- Small increase in the percentage of applicants eligible for services
- 5% increase in plans created
- 22% increase in case closures

DBS is continuing to look to the July 1 execution date for state funded contracts.

The Council discussed the need of clients for work clothes as the state begins to open and clients start working again. Director Doyle stated that DBS is working collaboratively with the CRP's in order to provide items that clients need.

Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (Florida ASB)

Elly du Pre' presented a report.

Elly acknowledged the positive relationship between Florida ASB and DBS which have been meeting once a week. Also, The Florida ASB meet once a week. The ability to have Zoom calls has made a big difference with maintaining and building trust.

Elly stated that the opening of the agency is a slow process all around the state. There is a huge variety of needs throughout the state. The agencies have been creative when identifying needs and addressing them.

Elly stated that most agencies are providing remote services and are finding that a lot of clients do not want to come in to the office yet, especially parents of young children and babies. A lot of staff and clients fall into the vulnerable category.

Transportation is a challenge due to social distancing.

The Council had a discussion regarding services to babies. Elly assured that most of the babies were being served remotely due to the parents not wanting to bring them into the agency or invite anyone into their home. The Council expressed their appreciation for CRP's continuing to reach out to clients.

There is a tendency to loose clients who are receiving services remotely. As a result, the agencies are scheduling sessions for an hour and a half and then having another session later in the day for another hour and a half.

Emotional support is more important now than ever before. People are needing time to socialize and talk to others. It's taking time to come up with a remote curriculum. Therapy has become more of a focus than ever before.

Summer camp will be held remotely. One of the major challenges is finding employers to participate in teenage work experience.

The Council had a discussion on the impact COVID has had on agency staff and entity closings. Elly stated that all agencies have been approved for the payroll protection plan provided through the CARES ACT. She stated that all staff is working. Elly stated that no agency has indicated that they are folding.

FRCB New Business

Paul made a **motion** to send a letter expressing our concern in reference to the timeliness and the much needed appointments. The letter will be send to the Governor, Commissioner of Education, Inspector General of the Department of Education and the Inspector General of the State of Florida. Denise seconded the motion.

Paul called the question.

Roll Call Vote

Kim Carr – yes

Denise Valkema – yes

Misty Porter –yes

Paul Edwards – yes

Mikey Wiseman – yes

Paul Edwards read the letter. There were no objections by Council members.

Bridget Giles stated in her conversation with RSA, they indicated that they would give conditional approval of the State Plan without a full Council. There would be 90 days to make a full correction and therefore get a full Council. The letter will Accompany the State Plan that Bridget will submit on Friday.

The Council had a brief discussion regarding FRCB July meeting. Selena will work to set up the meeting in Teams due to a freeze on travel at this time.

Public Forum

Mikey Wiseman welcomed everyone and called for introductions.

Council Members Present:

Mikey Wiseman, Robert Doyle, Paul Edwards, Kim Carr, Denise Valkema, Misty Porter

DBS Staff

Bridget Giles, Marian Rezkallah, Sila Miller, Wayne Jennings, Bobbie Howard Davis, Mireya Hernandez, Pamela Ortiz

Council Staff

Selena Sickler

Former Members Waiting on Reappointment

Howard Bell, Jorge Hernandez, Tracie Inman

Public Comment

Consumer #1 stated the importance of the Conklin Center to have a residential program.

Ronnie Silverman stated that CVI had submitted a proposal to reinstate the services that the Conklin Center had.

Director Doyle stated there had been communication with the FRCB. He stated that the first priority was to focus on former residents of the Conklin Center. He stated that they were home due to COVID 19 but the goal was to get them to the Rehab Center at the appropriate time. The other focus is to ensure that the members of the community who were receiving services from the Conklin Center continue to have their needs met and the services that they need.

Director Doyle stated that he did not see returning the original model, without any modifications.

Consumer #2 stated that plans were in the process to reestablish the Project Insight Program.

Consumer#3 stated her concern over the lack of accessibility of web pages specifically regarding applying for a job as well as the software required to do the job.

Mikey encouraged her to reach out to DBS.

Director Doyle stated that there are laws that require websites to be accessible.

Pamela Ortiz encouraged reaching out to their counselor for assistance with the application.

Ana Saint Fort recommended reaching out to DBS for Rehab Engineering assistance who can provide assistance with the client and their employer.

Consumer#4 stated her concern that the Deaf/Blind community is feeling isolated during the COVID19 pandemic.

Director Doyle stated that DBS will follow up with the client.

Consumer#5 stated her concern over the residential program not continuing at the Conklin Center.

Consumer#6 thanked everyone for their efforts during the COVID19 pandemic.

Sheila Young stated The American Council of the Blind has been doing 4-6 community chats calls per day in order to stay in touch with consumers. They are done via Zoom, conference calls and computer. Ms. Young can be reached at [Florida Council of the Blind](#).

Denise Valkema stated The National Federation of the Blind has been doing Zoom calls that are listed on [NFBNet](#). For more information, you can reach Denise Valkema by [email](#). The National Federation of the Blind meeting will hold its next virtual meeting on July 14-18.

Paul Edwards thanked the CRP's for their participation in the meeting. Mikey echoed that sentiment.

Selena read a letter from Ms. Darlene Laibl-Crowe. Mikey asked DBS to address the subject of volunteering which Ms. Laibl-Crowe stated in her letter was not supported by DBS. Director Doyle stated he was not sure where the information was gathered, however, he stated that he supported volunteering that could provide a great opportunity to gain experience and possibility lead to paid work opportunity. Director Doyle stated that he would like to explore where the information was disseminated from. He will ask Ana to follow up with Ms. Laibl-Crowe.

Mikey suggested doing some research to find out if a referral was made to a collaborative partner and any evaluation was supposed to be given, but did not due to a lack of a reasonable accommodation. It is unclear where the referral came from, but it is a concern.

Mikey stated his appreciation for all attendees' who participated in the meeting. He thanked the CRP's and the agency for being available.

Paul Edwards made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned.