

**Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes**

October 28, 2021

Chair Jorge Hernandez called the meeting to order with the introductions

Council Members Present

- Bruce Miles
- Nancy Bateh
- Robert Kelly
- Jorge Hernandez
- Bessie Outman
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Donte Mickens
- Robert Doyle
- Jennifer Coburn
- Douglas Ingram
- Howard Bell

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

Adoption of Agenda

Patricia Lipovsky **motion** to **accept** an amended agenda to accommodate unplanned changes in the schedule. Bruce Miles **seconded** the **motion**. The motion was **passed**.

Approval of July 29, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Bruce Miles made a **motion** to **accept** July 29th, 2021 meeting minutes. Patricia Lipovsky **seconded** the **motion**. The motion was **passed**.

Deputy Director's Update

Trina Travis presented this update

- The Division of Blind Services was able to participate in a Pedestrian Safety Event with the Department of Transportation in honor of National Disability Awareness Month. A demonstration by DBS's Outreach Consultant Sila Miller was given.
- DBS hosted a White Cane Awareness Event in the Turlington Building Café 325, the event was much success. Many DBS offices around the state were able to host successful events as well, including the Daytona Rehabilitation Center whose local Police Chief joined them also.
- DBS also participated in a National Disability Employment Awareness Month Webinar in partnership with VR and EPD. The topic this year was on Assistive Technology.
- The Division is in the planning phase of implementing a Registered Apprenticeship that would allow individuals with visual impairments an opportunity to explore a career in the Information Technology Industry.
- DBS met with a training company that offers curation as a service, called Udemy. If a partnership takes place, they will provide online training for DBS staff.

VR Report

Marian Rezkallah presented an overview of the VR Report on behalf of Bridget Giles.

- The total number of clients served for the first quarter was 3475 compared to last year when 3334 were served
- Total number of closed cases 371 of which 122 were successful
- Last year successful closed cases were 109
- The number of unsuccessful closures after receiving services is 141
- Last year unsuccessful closures after receiving services were 121
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 46%
- Average hourly wage is \$15.76
- Highest wage is \$50.00
- The lowest wage is \$8.56

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (68 cases)
- Refused services or no further services (55 cases)
- Other Reasons (38 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (28 cases)
- Client moving out of state (15 cases)

Improvements for quarter 1:

- Signed and stamped application for services
- Maintenance forms completed, and justifications entered
- Initial interview completion and signed
- Timely obtained vocational evaluations
- Releases of information forms signed and dated
- Quarterly client contact and college student contact

The Council requested that the number of people post successful closures be added to the report.

BSF Vocational Evaluation Tool Update

Paul Edwards presented the update

The Florida Blind Services Foundation Vocational Evaluation Tool (BSFVET) is a contemporary career exploration and job preparedness assessment tool designed specifically for people who are blind or have low vision. It helps provide meaningful information for both clients and evaluators about the test takers' competencies as visually impaired people and their employability prospects. It also provides discussion points for evaluators, counselors, and other service providers to discuss relevant and viable career options with clients.

- Blind Service Foundations provided funded over the last two years for the development and testing of the Vocational Evaluation Tool.
- Dr. Karen Wolffe was hired to work on the Evaluation Tool.
- Over 70 iterations of the Vocational Evaluation Tool were tested in 2021.

- Karen Wolffe is currently completing additional assignments that are being funded by the Foundation; completing her manual and working on activities that are finishing up the availability of the Tool to be widely utilized.
- The Foundation is in hopes that the American Printing House for the Blind would take the tool over and administer its future use so that it will be available all over the Country from the APH site.
- The formal stage of the Vocational Evaluation Tool is coming to an end, but the foundation will continue to work on improvements and approaches.
- It is the intention of the Foundation and Dr. Wolffe to transfer responsibility for overseeing the website where the Tool is located and the scoring of iterations of the Tool to the Division Blind Services (DBS).
- Legislation has been passed by the Florida Legislator that will allow the Foundation and the DBS to consider how they would like to continue distributing the test as it becomes more widely accepted.
- The Foundation, DBS, and Dr. Wolffe are in discussion on copywriting the Tool and its distribution.

DA Report: District 7

Mireya Hernandez, Program Administrator presented the report on behalf of Nancy Brown, District Administrator.

District 7 is comprised of a main office in Tampa and a satellite office in Lakeland. The District serves 7 counties that stretch across a total of 5,660 square miles. County coverage areas are as follows: Citrus, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, and Polk.

Performance Goals:

For FY 2021-2022, the District has been assigned a goal of 100 successfully rehabilitated VR closures. To date,

- Successfully closed 22 clients
- Employed status 29 cases

District 7 is on target to meet and exceed their assigned goal.

Open Caseload Data:

- Blind Babies – 96
- Children’s Program – 187
- Older Blind Program IL – 295
- Adult Program IL – 29
- Vocational Rehabilitation – 439*
- Potentially Eligible – 1

*78 transition, 47 College Cases

VR Employment by Job Categories: Successful (20-21)

- Agricultural, Forestry, Fishing, and Related – 2
- Clerical/Administrative Support – 17
- Managerial/Administrative – 4
- Prod, Const, Operating, Paint, Material Handling – 9
- Professional, Paraprofessional, Technical – 33
- Sales/Related Occupations – 3
- Service Occupations – 30
- Clerical/Administrative Support - 5
- Professional, Paraprofessional, Technical – 6
- Service Occupations - 7

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Mireya Hernandez on behalf of Nancey Brown, District Administrator – District 7 Tampa, recognized Lowe’s in Largo as an Outstanding Employer in Pinellas County. Mireya Hernandez accepted the award on their behalf.

Bureau of Exceptional Student Education Update

Jennifer Coburn, Program Specialist IV, presented the report.

The Vision Rule

The Exceptional Student Education Eligibility for Students Who Are Visually Impaired.

- A medical eye examination describing diagnosis.
- A comprehensive assessment of skills known to be impacted by visual impairment.
- An orientation and mobility screening.
- A visual acuity of 20/70 or less in the better eye after best possible correction.
- Supportive services, such as cooperative planning with the Division of Blind Services, including parent involvement activities.

A complete description of the Vision Rule can be found at:

<https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/ese-eligibility/visual-impairment-vi-blind-partly-sigh.stml>

The Florida Instructional Material Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC) are in the process of revamping the certification for visual impairments to ensure that teachers are getting quality information.

September 2021 FIMC has begun to teach braille in the Florida prison system. This will allow access to more braille books for Florida's visually impaired students.

Lighthouse of Pinellas, Inc. CRP Report

Jason Druding, Strategic Services Director, presented the report.

Mission

Our mission is "to advance the independence and quality of life for individuals in Pinellas County who are blind or visually impaired."

Vision

Every individual who is blind or visually impaired has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest potential and to pursue his or her aspirations in all aspects of life.

Services

- Independent Living-Older Blind – Current Clients 21
- Independent Living-Adult Program – Current Clients 3
- Vocational Rehabilitation – Current Clients 54
- Teen Transition Program – Current Clients 17
- Blind Babies – Current Clients 5

It is important to note that Lighthouse of Pinellas assisted with securing employment for 10 VR clients during Oct. 1, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2021, even with hiring being impacted by COVID-19.

In addition to their traditional contract programs, Lighthouse of Pinellas offered children age 6-12 a summer Life Skills Camp focused on independent living and communication skills. 7 clients participated in the Life Skills Camp.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind CRP Report

Nicole Kissell, Program Director, presented the CRP report on behalf of Stefanie Pontlitz, CEO

Mission

The mission of the Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind is to educate, empower, and employ people in Pasco, Hernando and Citrus Counties who are visually impaired and blind.

Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind is a small nonprofit with a full-time staff of 7 and a part time staff of 18. More than 30% of the staff experience varying degrees of visual impairment or blindness. 4 clients were brought on board as staff after successful completion of services at LVIB.

Counties Served

- Pasco
- Hernando

- Citrus

Services

- Blind Babies – 13
- Children’s Program – 12
- Industries -4
- Adult Program – 7
- Older Blind - 23

Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind spring fundraiser, The Chasco Coronation Ball, is set to occur on March 25, 2022. The Ball will celebrate Chasco Fiesta’s 100th anniversary and is highly anticipated by the community since it was cancelled the last 2 years.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Conklin Center Update

Bessie Outman, council member, presented this update.

Ronee David, CEO, joined the in for an update as well.

- The Center for the Visually Impaired and the Conklin Center has merged . The new entity is called the Conklin Davis Center.
- The agencies combined have a total of 52 staff members.
- The Conklin Davis Center is in the process of being renovated, including a nature trail.
- The Center was approved for a grant in the amount of \$600,000+ for a new AC system.
- There are currently 10 students, 6 are residence.
- Amongst the many staff, the Conklin Davis Center has 2 Active and Daily Living teachers, 1 Orientation and Mobility Specialist, 3 Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, 5 Employment Specialist, and 1 Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) who also contributions to the Job Readiness Program.

- Conklin Davis Center has partnered with Metro Electronics INC. an equipment repair company. Students are paid a minimum salary and are tasked with the components sent by Metro Electronics.
- The Employment Specialist have been very successful with finding students' jobs. 7 students are currently employed with Metro Electronics INC. and several others are employed in local restaurants.

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Quarter 1 - 4 Report SFY 2020-2021

Dr. Minna Jia presented an overview of the report.

Survey Procedures

- The Florida State University Survey Foundry (FSUSF), Institute of Science and Public Affairs conducted a telephone survey of former DBS clients on a monthly basis
- Survey Population: July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, 1038 clients.
- Case Closure Status: 679 (65%) successful closure (68 post closure) vs. 359 (35%) unsuccessful closure.
- Response Rate: 34%, completions are 349.
- Working phone numbers: 724
- Among 349 respondents, 295 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- Among 349 respondents, 69% (240) has successfully closed case while 31% (109) has unsuccessfully cases.

Major Changes

Due to the impact of Covid-19 changes were made to the coding system in order to catch high frequency answers.

- 6% of clients left DBS due to Covid 19
- When answered the open-ended questions about how DBS can improve? 3% of the respondents mentioned Covid-19 related measures. Hope to meet in-person again.
- New question added on awareness of the Daytona Beach Rehab Center, 49% are aware, 36% of the respondents are interested in services.
- Satisfaction level with DBS training services increased 93% or more, career counseling increased from 86% to 93%
- Satisfaction level of experience with counselors improved from last year. Both responsiveness and accessibility have improved.

- Less Clients came to DBS for employment reasons (75% to 51%)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

Director Doyle and the council had a brief discussion about federal mandates and how it may negatively impact blind vendors.

Staff Updates:

- Brandis Hall is now the official Staff Assistance to the FRCB
- Charles Triplett, Government Operations Consultant II, has joined the State Office team.
- Kiyanna Williams, Program Administrator, has joined the State Office team.
- Ranburn Christian, Distributed Computer Systems Consultant, has joined the State Office team.
- Danielle Byrd, HSPCI - Employment Program Counselor, has joined District 2 team.
- Norma Rodriguez, Employment Placement Specialist, has joined District 12 Team along with a new Reader/Driver
- Audrey Hall, HSPCI - Employment Program Counselor, has joined District 3 team. As well as Natasha Ducali, Rehab Technician.
- Janice Digmon, Staff Assistant, has joined District 1. In addition, John Hudnall will be moving from OPS to a permanent position, Senior Word Processor.
- Doreen Minott, Staff Assistant, was promoted in District 11.
- James Oates, Senior Rehab Specialist Blind, has joined the Rehabilitation Center team.
- Daritza Roman-Lopez, HSPCI - Employment Program Counselor, has joined District 6 team.
- Ed Hudson has retired, and DBS is continuing efforts to secure a new Bureau Chief for the Rehabilitation Center.

Rehabilitation Center:

- DBS is looking forward to rebranding the Rehabilitation Center.
- With some residence moving out and others moving in, it is the intent to have at least 15-20 out of 30 dorm rooms filled with one occupant by the end of January 2022.
- Deputy Director Trina Travis will be traveling to the Rehabilitation center more often to spend time with the team, learning in depth details, and making sure the Rehab center receives support while we recruit a new bureau chief.

FY 2020-2021 DBS Contracts Summary:

- Related to overall contract dollars spent, 9% increase in Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Related to overall contract dollars spent, 1% decrease in Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services
- Related to client deliverables, 10% increase in Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Related to client deliverables, 8% increase in Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.
- Percentage of direct hours provided to clients, 34% increase in Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 63% decrease in financial consequences in the VR Program.
- 68% increase in financial consequences in Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services.
- 5 CRP's reached bonus eligibility in VR amounting \$95,721.86
- 6 CRP's reached bonus eligibility in TS amounting \$67,266.25
- A detailed FY 2020-2021 DBS Contracts Summary will be sent to the Council.

Rate / Sustainability Study Update:

- San Diego State University is undergoing data validation after receiving cost data from four CRP's
- A draft report is expected in November 2021 and finalized in December 2021.

The Council had a brief discussion about the Gifts and Donations fund. The fund continues to do well. The State Board of Administration which manages the funds suggested transferring to a different entity due to the relatively small size of the fund. The SBA feels the fund is not big enough as an institutional investor for the large fund pool it's in. This in all likelihood will yield a less favorable return. However, the fund has been able to be maintained through the years it's been there.

Council Business:

The Council held Appointment of Committees

The Planning Committee:

Jennifer Coburn

Doug Ingram

Patricia Lipovsky

Bruce Miles (Committee Chair)

Paul Edwards (Committee Advisor)

Earline Bessie Outman

The Evaluation Committee:

Donte Mickens (Committee Chair)

Nancy Bateh

Howard Bell

Patricia Lipovsky

Robert Kelly

Earline Bessie Outman

Agenda Items for February 10th -11th, 2022

- Gift and Donation Update
- BSF Vocational Evaluation Tool Update
- Client Satisfaction Survey
- By-Laws Committee

The Council held a brief discussion about the current FRCB By-Laws.

Patricia Lipovsky made a **motion** to revise the By-Laws Bruce Miles **second** the **motion**. The action was to confirm that the FRCB Chair holds the authority to excuse council members in person absence and approve participating via teleconference on a case-by-case bases. The **motion** passed. The committee will discuss changes at the next in person meeting.

Bruce Miles made a **motion** to have October 2022 meeting in Miami. Patricia Lipovsky **second**. The motion was **passed**.

Patricia Lipovsky made a **motion** to adjourn, Bessie Outman **second** the **motion**. The motion **passed**.