

**Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)**  
**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**  
**Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront**  
**225 East Coastline Drive**  
**Jacksonville, FL 32202**

**October 29, 2020**

Chair Paul Edwards called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. with the introductions and Pledge of Allegiance led by Patricia Lipovsky.

**Council Members Present**

- Paul Edwards
- Kim Carr
- Misty Porter
- Robert Doyle
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**Council Staff**

- Selena Sickler

**Adoption of Agenda**

Misty Porter made a **motion** to accept the agenda. Kim Carr seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

**Approval of Ocala Meeting Minutes**

Misty Porter made a **motion** to accept the Ocala meeting minutes. Kim Carr seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

## Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

- No new council appointments at this time
- Permission for critical hires for DBS staff has been received

Since Covid-19 there has been a percentage decrease in the number of applications for service. Comparing to October 2018 – 2019 and 2019 - 2020:

- 17% decrease in applications
- 2018-2019 had 4634 new applications for service compared to 2019-2020 with 3858. That's a 776 difference over a year's time
- There has been a 15% decrease in individuals who have applied and been determined eligible for services. Actual number in change 620. (all programs)
- 3% decrease in number of plans created. Actual number in change is 165
- 1% decrease in case closures. Actual number in change is 43
- VR program has a 10% decrease in applications. Actual number in change 206
- 7% decrease in individuals who have applied and been determined eligible for services. Actual number in change 103. (VR Program)
- 5% increase in number of plans created for employment related services. Actual number in change 175. (VR Program)
- 2% increase in case closures. Actual number in change 36. (VR Program)
- ILOB 25% decrease in applications. Actual number of change 492
- ILOB 24% decrease in eligible applicants, 13% decrease in number of plans created, and 2% decrease in case closures

Residential Facilities:

- No definitive date on reopening. Dialog is taking place amongst leadership to determine plan for moving forward
- Conversation is being had between team members and leadership on assessing the Rehab Center. Where we've been? Where are we now? Where are we going?
- Plans for evolving into a Career Technical Center for the Blind, apprenticeships, and a call center amongst other things are being discussed as potential opportunities
- The Conklin Center partnership is still being reviewed. It is DBS intent to reimagine supported employment services in Daytona Beach

### Rate / Sustainability Study

- San Diego State University has responded and a kickoff to this project will undergo within the next few weeks
- The rate study will envision all programs and consist of data, cost, contracts, and various other analyzations
- Evaluations, comparisons, recommendations and strategies will be given to implement change
- Rate study is expected to be completed by September 2021
- Cost is anticipated to be less than \$100,000

### DOE/DBS Initiatives:

- DOE is continuing to look at IT consolidation with a focus on streamlining and security. They are committed to having the Directors at the table to provide assistance
- DBS is focused on accessibility and offering accessibility training services statewide

The Council had a discussion regarding CRP's reopening, not meeting deliverables, and experiencing financial consequences.

- The Council suggested that Sheryl Brown presents a report on where they are 6 months into the new approach
- The Council also suggested that Director Doyle reports information on the current status of the current financial consequences for the CRP's

### **VR Report**

Bridget Giles presented an overview of the VR Report.

- The total number of clients served for the first quarter was 3337 compared to last year when 3260 were served
- Total number of closed cases 323 of which 109 were successful
- Last year successful closed cases was 99
- The number of unsuccessful closures after receiving services is 121
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 47%
- Average hourly wage is \$23.12
- Highest wage is \$50.00
- The lowest wage is \$8.50

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (44 cases)
- Refused services or no further services (51 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (28 cases)
- Moved out of state (20 cases)
- Does not require VR services (27 cases)

### **DBS State Plan**

Director Doyle presented an updated overview on the progress of the Unified State Plan.

- The plan is for 4 years with, 2-year updates
- Unified State Plan only has the primary core partners in Florida. That consists of, DBS, DEO, DVR, Career Source, and DCTE
- Updates have been completed and submitted for approval for both the Unified State Plan and the DBS 5-year Strategic Plan

Bridget Giles provided update on final plan approved by the Federal Government.

- Plan was submitted on March 3, 2020 and approved on September 4, 2020
- Plan runs from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2024
- Focuses include: employment and training programs, empowering individuals to make sure they are able to make decisions based on informed choices, universal access and increased accountability
- The Council's feedback and suggestions for the State Plan was appreciated and incorporated into the plan
- A copy of the entire plan can be found at [www.careersourceflorida.com](http://www.careersourceflorida.com)

Stephanie Brown provided an overview on the overall Strategic Plan for the division.

### **Goal 1 – Highest Client Achievement**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Coordinate and secure high-quality training, education, work experiences, and partnerships that create opportunities for blind and visually impaired Floridians to obtain and maintain independence, post-secondary education credentials, and successful employment outcomes.

- 1.1 - Secure opportunities for students/youth with disabilities to practice and improve workplace skills
- 1.2 - Ensure clients participating in training and education programs are benefiting
- 1.3 - Increase the utilization of online job systems/portals to expose employers to job-ready DBS clients
- 1.4 - Increase the participation of clients in industry certifications and other post-secondary client outcomes
- 1.5 - Develop and implement an Employment Skills Training Program at the Residential Rehabilitation Center

## **Goal 2 – Seamless Articulation & Maximum Access**

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Create a comprehensive service delivery system that fosters accessibility and provides positive experiences for blind and visually impaired Floridians enabling them to matriculate from school/training to work. Improve outreach methods to reach more clients, advocates, providers, employers, and other stakeholders.

- 2.1 - Increase the provision of accessibility tools, awareness, and regular follow-up with clients to ensure equality in educational experiences and vocational opportunities
- 2.2 - Create and implement comprehensive communications and outreach plans
- 2.3 - Increase the number of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities receiving services
- 2.4 - Increase outreach efforts to underserved and unserved populations

## **Goal 3 – Skilled Workforce & Economic Development**

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Assist blind and visually impaired Floridians with obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment.

- 3.1 - Develop and strengthen employer relationships by providing employers with training, support, education, and resources
- 3.2 - Increase successful employment outcomes, including self-employment, for transition-age youth, adults, and seniors
- 3.3 - Create successful job outcomes in the Business Enterprise Program
- 3.4 - Support DBS clients in becoming self-supporting
- 3.5 - Develop mechanisms to maximize job placement effectiveness among DBS Employment Placement Specialists and contracted service providers

## **Goal 4 – Quality Efficient Services**

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Create an accountable and exemplary division workforce that ensures high-quality services.

- 4.1 - Increase staff development and continuing education opportunities for DBS personnel
- 4.2 - Incorporate elements of the common performance measures into employee performance expectations and evaluations
- 4.3 - Increase opportunities for data sharing and improve data validity and integrity
- 4.4 - Decrease federal and state audit findings
- 4.5 - Develop strong fiscal policies and procedures to promote responsible stewardship of available resources and address WIOA requirements
- 4.6 - Strengthen contract language to ensure increased contractor accountability, improve resource allocations, address WIOA regulations and encourage maximum achievement of client independence
- 4.7 - Strengthen contract monitoring activities and procedures/protocols to reflect new requirements
- 4.8 - Improve the employees' workplace environment
- 4.9 - Improve library services by obtaining customer feedback

With measurements each quarter, each goal has strategies in place for accomplishments.

Plan can be found at:

<http://dbs.myflorida.com/Leadership/Strategic-Plan/index.html>

### **DA Report: District 9**

Ana Saint-Fort presented the report.

- District 9 consist of nine counties and scratches about 8374 square miles
- More than 80% of the served population is in the rural area
- About 55% of the served population are Hispanic
- Team members are doing a superb job and even with the number of vacancies, clients are getting the services currently needed with the help of the CRP's
- For state fiscal year 19-20, 84 successful cases were assigned and 108 were obtained exceeding the goal with 129% achievement

Currently (YTD):

- 8 cases closed and 23 in progress
- Blind Babies: Ft. Myers 51 cases. Palmetto 35 cases
- Children’s Program: Ft. Myers 242 cases. Palmetto 176 cases.
- Independent Living Program: Ft. Myers 269 cases. Palmetto 164 cases.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program: Ft Myers 184 cases. Palmetto 176 cases.
- College cases Ft. Myers 20, Palmetto 12. Pre transition cases Ft Myers 38, Palmetto 33.
- Expenditures (July-October)
- Services to clients: \$7,880
- Eligibility and assessments: \$4,500
- Maintenance: \$39,316
- Physical and mental restoration: \$190,356
- Technology: \$32,418
- Non-contracted training: \$65,107
- Transportation: \$2,360
- Outreach activities are still going full force

### **Employer Recognition**

Leigh Ann Bellamy, Assistant District Administrator – District 9 Palmetto, recognized Publix Supermarkets. She accepted the award on their behalf.

### **Lighthouse of Collier, Inc.**

Wendy Olson presented the report. The mission of Lighthouse of Collier is to foster independence and enhance the quality of life for the blind/visually impaired and their caregivers. Currently they have nine employees, including one Assistive Technology Specialist who is visually impaired.

- Early intervention services are offered. As well as, Children’s program, transition program, adult program, and direct instruction for mobility assistive technology Monthly and weekly trainings are provided
- Several support groups are taking place throughout the week including a recently added support group for Spanish speakers
- Recreation and leisure options are provided as well; audio book club, history club, coffee chat, arts and craft, and descriptive yoga and fitness classes

Since Covid-19, unique classes have been added to meet the needs of the situation.

- Teaching clients how to order groceries online or have them delivered
- Teaching how to clean their home for Covid-19 and all kinds of assistive technology over the phone and using zoom etc.
- A dual sensory loss class is also offered

Regarding outreach:

- Relationships with the medical community, Baskin Palmer and Benita Eye Clinic. Vision Refer System is being used, a database that enables the medical community and other agencies to send referrals
- Attending several events at FGCU and colleges as well as senior living facilities and daycares to talk about services provided

Clients served (YTD):

- Babies program - 7 served, 12 goal; on target
- Children's Program – 10 served, 21 on caseload; 8 are seen semi-monthly
- Transition Students – 12 served
- Virtual Summer Camp – 12 attendees
- Adult Program – 60 served, 67 goal; exceeding target
- Independent Living AP – 7 served
- Vocational Rehabilitation – 9 served
- 55 clients fall under the "other" category

Achievements:

- Harvey Kapnick Award for program excellence

Goals:

- Bigger facility
- Lighthouse store
- Transportation for mobility trainings and outing for the summer camp
- Dine in the Dark event is being planned for March 24, 2021.

### **Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Annual Report SFY 2019-2020**

Dr. Minna Jia presented an overview of the SFY Annual Report 2019-2020.

- 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
- Employment-bound clients with cases “closed” between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 comprises the population surveyed for the year-end report.
- DBS had 1003 former clients for 2019/2020 of which 596 clients had successful closures.
- Annual data shows overall satisfaction with DBS has increased to 93%. This is one of two of the highest satisfaction since 2004. Last highest was 2014 of 93%
- Case closure awareness was the lowest rate since 2009 at 78%
- Refusal rate decreased from 24% to 17%
- Clients experience with counselors has improved in all categories, including DBS staff
- The response rate to the survey for 2019-2020 is 30% (296 completed interviews). This was accomplished by repeated attempts and call backs. This response rate remains at the same level as the previous year’s response rate and is higher than other years where 24% of former clients participated in the survey in 2017 while 28% of former clients participated in the Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2016.

### **Able United**

John Finch, Director presented.

### **Mission Statement**

To encourage and assist the saving of private funds to help persons with disabilities cover costs that support their health, independence and quality of life.

- The Florida legislature passed the Florida Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, which was signed into law on May 21, 2015. This state law establishes ABLE United, to oversee the state of Florida’s qualified ABLE program, which is called ABLE United.
- The Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, a federal law enacted in December 2014, authorizes each state to establish a program that offers tax-free savings and investment options to encourage individuals with a disability and their families to save private funds to support health, independence, and quality of life

- Money contributed to an account in one of these programs is generally disregarded when determining eligibility for federal benefit programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid

#### How It Works:

1. *Open an account:* It's free and takes about 15 minutes. The individual with a disability owns the account, but an authorized person may open and oversee the account.
  2. *Contribute:* Get started saving with as little as \$25. Save up to \$15,000 per year – individually or with the help of family and friends.
  3. *Choose investments:* Choose from three predesigned portfolios or five individuals funds, including an FDIC-insured savings option, to build a portfolio that meets your savings goals.
  4. *Withdraw:* Easily access funds online by requesting an electronic transfer to: a linked bank account or reloadable ABLE Visa® Prepaid Card; or request a paper check from customer service.
- Must be a Florida resident at the time of application and have a qualifying disability with onset prior to age 26
  - More information can be found at [www.ableunited.com](http://www.ableunited.com)

#### **Lighthouse of Southwest Florida**

Dotty St. Amand, CEO, presented a report.

The mission of the Lighthouse of Southwest Florida is to enable people of all ages living with a visual impairment or blindness to remain independent, active, and productive in society.

- 18 staff positions are currently filled with one vacancy (driver)
- Seven employees are either blind or visually impaired
- 10 employees have certifications in vision rehabilitation therapy, O&M, low vision therapy, TVI, and CATIS.
- In addition to funding and partnership with DBS, Lighthouse of Southwest Florida also partners with United Way Agency, receiving funding from Lee County Human Services

- In order to help our clients and instructors with the family dynamics, two social workers are on the staff, one in holds a master's degree in clinical social work
- The spacious facility allows for a teaching kitchen, labs for assistive technology, children's space, art studio, and single lens music recreational program
- Transportation program consist of 3 vans and 5 sedans. It is funded by FDOT with the 5310 grants. This allows transportation for not only clients but provides a way to get the visually impaired staff into the community to render itinerant services
- During the pandemic Southwest Florida was able to quickly shift to assisting the meals on wheels route. Which allowed Wellness checks on the older adults in the community including clients
- Team members were able to shift quickly during the pandemic to remote operations, investing into the proper equipment and technology definitely played a role.

Clients served (YTD): 391 compared to last year 387.

- Clients served in all programs exceeded goals
- Children's Program - 35 served Goal 11
- Blind Babies - 27 served
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program - 45 served
- Older Blind Adult Program - 265 served
- Transition Program - Unknown (audio issues)

### **Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center**

Lisa Howard, Chief Executive Officer presented a report.

Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center's mission is to educate and empower those affected by vision loss so that they may be able to enjoy happy, healthy, and independent lives. The vision is to transform the community so those with vision loss have the opportunity participate, contribute, and rise to their desired potential.

- There are 33 staff members; 18 are full time salaried employees and 7 are visually impaired
- Certified staff; 2 CVRT's, 2 O&M's, and 2 CATIS

Clients served (YTD): 511, 399 DBS clients and 112 non-DBS clients

- The full time outreach coordinator was able to reach 12,550 individuals in networking events, presentations, lunch and learns, and health fairs
- Programs: Children’s Program (not contracted) Transition Program, Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Employment Services Program (recently started), and Independent Living Program.
- 9,746 hours of direct services to clients and 27,600 hours on the road (due to large service area)
- There is a fleet of 5 vehicles provided by grants.
- Quick and successful transitioning took place during Covid-19 to continue to assist clients.
- Weekly meeting are held for staff and client trainings.
- A podcast has been created for assistive technology. Just say, Hey Alexa or google, “Play, Let’s Talk about Assistive Technology Podcast”
- New accessible sight! Technology training videos are also available on website. [www.Lighthouseeducationcenter.org](http://www.Lighthouseeducationcenter.org)

### **October 2021 Meeting Place**

Misty Porter **motioned** St. Petersburg for place of meeting. Kim Carr **seconded** the motion.

### **Agenda Items**

- More information on how Covid-19 is impacting the CRP’s service delivery
- Director Doyle’s update on Needs Assessment
- Able Trust 5 Year Transportation Plan
- Public forum

Paul Edwards made a motion to adjourn. Misty Porter seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.