

**Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)**  
**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**  
**Hotel Dello Fort Lauderdale Airport, Tapestry Collection by Hilton**  
**28 S Federal Hwy, Dania Beach, FL 33004**  
**February 9 - 10, 2023**

**Council Members Present**

- Arthur Moody
- Bruce Miles
- Ciwanda McDonald
- Denise Valkema
- Donte Mickens
- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Paul Edwards
- Paul Martinez
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Roxann Mayros
- Sead Bekric
- Sophia Eccleston

**Council Members Absent**

- Misty Porter
- Nancy Bateh

**Council Staff**

- Brandis Hall
- Alexandra Diggs

Chairman Jorge Hernandez called the meeting to order with introductions and Pledge of Allegiance led by Doug Ingram.

## **Adoption of Agenda**

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept the meeting's agenda. Denise Valkema second the motion. Motion passed.

## **Approval of October 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Bruce Miles made a motion to accept October 27th – 28th 2022, meeting minutes. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

## **Director's Report**

Director Doyle presented his report.

### **DBS Staff Update:**

- Justin Mills and Stephanie Brown, former Bureau Chief of External Affairs, have moved to other positions within the Department of Education.
- Sandra Brown, former Assistant District Administrator in Tampa has retired.
- Jeff Whitehead last day with DBS was February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.
- Mary Cross will be returning to DBS as Tampa, District 7, Assistant District Administrator.
- Jennifer Gainey will be returning to DBS in her role as Personnel Administrator.

### **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)**

- Florida Division of Blind Services will be one of the 15 agency programs that will be monitored by the RSA this year.
- DBS' last full monitoring was in 2017.
  - Outstanding's from 2017 monitoring
    - Substitute Time Reporting System
    - Rate Study
- RSA is anticipating being on the ground on site here in Florida the week of July 18<sup>th</sup>. There will be an opportunity for the Rehab Council Members to provide some input during the process. There will be an opportunity potentially for some other stakeholders to also provide some input.
- There are two main components of monitoring.
  - Fiscal Arena
    - Controls and expenditure of dollars
  - Program Outcomes and Performances

- State agencies were unable to spend in the last cycle due to various reasons, returning over \$337,000,000 to the State. DBS returned 8 million dollars.
- These dollars are specifically for employment programs.
  - It is expected that more dollars will be allocated in contracts in regard to the rate study. Additional dollars may be used for establishment projects. Such as supporting CRPs assisting facilities with hurricane damage and setting up satellite locations in rural areas.

#### Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:

- The Rehabilitation Services Administration requires that the Division conducts a comprehensive needs assessment every three years.
- The assessment will help DBS determine how to focus attention where there may be unmet needs.
- DBS has met with FASB and San Diego State University to try to determine whether or not the format of the new data can be utilized.
- FASB has suggested utilizing the Statement of Functional Expenses which has never been used for a rate study.
- The utilization of this tool could be genius. However, there are some complications because not all reports are formatted the same way, time periods are not aligned, and in some areas they're potentially statement of functional expenses that could suggest that a program is supporting the funding of another program.

#### Budget:

- Governor's recommended budget.
  - 5% pay increase for State employees.
  - Increase funds for those in the Investment Plan.
  - Increase funds for retirees, Department of Education Workforce Education
  - Teacher salary increases and more, with money left in that budget for reserves.
- DBS's request from the budget amongst others,
  - Recommendation : provide indirect rate to providers.
  - Recommendation : \$347,000 indirect rates to lighthouses.
  - Recommendation : \$595,000 for the library shelving.

- Recommendation : \$100,000,000 for the Children’s Program

#### Administrative Fair Hearing: reporting October 2022 – January 2023

- An administrative fair hearing occurs when an individual is dissatisfied with the service of the agency, and they have a right to request a hearing. There are certain procedures and requirements that lead to this hearing.
- DBS reviews, discuss, and find ways to best serve the client and resolve any conflicts before they escalate to a hearing.
  - 75 calls total
  - 57 inquiries were simple, resolved in 1-2 phone calls.
  - 16 of those were intermediate, meaning that they required some district intervention.
  - 2 were complex, requiring administrative fair hearings.
    - Paul Edwards motioned to have the redacted versions of the administrative fair hearings shared with the Council. Roxann Mayros seconded the motion. The motion carried.
    - Director Doyle will confirm that the Council is able to hold a 30-minute closed session during the business portion.

#### FRCB meetings

- Douglas Ingram inquired about DBS plans for outreach and social media.
  - Director Doyle informed the Council that DBS is engaging with Moore Communications. The focus is on identifying individuals who could benefit from DBS services.
  - DBS is looking at options for radio and online advertising, as well as print. Discussions for graphics, language, and other logistics are in progress.
- Paul Edwards encouraged DBS to carry the Council’s notion to the Workforce that they will be held accountable for the way it serves people with disabilities.
- Paul Edward, Jorge Hernandez, and Denise Valkema expressed concerns for funding for the older blind.
  - Director Doyle mentioned that there are efforts happening on the federal level to increase dollars granted. DBS is also looking into measures that will better capture premature closed cases for the Older Blind.

DBS has partnered with Able United, and each district is encouraged to help clients open up an Able United account. Upon opening an account Able United is giving an additional \$50.00 to each new account holder. This will allow individuals with disabilities to save money without risk of losing their benefits.

Councilmen Douglas Ingram announced that CEO Kim Galban-Countryman of the Lighthouse of the Big Bend, has submitted her letter of resignation, her last day will be May 19<sup>th</sup>. A smooth transition is expected for a new hire.

### **DBS Employment Report**

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented this report for quarter 2.

Common Performance Measures:

These measures represent clients who maintained employment in qtr 2 and qtr 4 after exiting the program.

- 43% did not maintain employment in the second quarter.
- 14% remained employed in the fourth quarter.

Quarter 2 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served for Q2 3520
- 335 closed cases of which 158 were successful.
- 182 successfully closed cases last year.
- 90 unsuccessful closures after receiving services.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 64%
- The average hourly wage is \$16.40.
- The highest wage is \$35.58.
- The lowest wage is \$10.00.

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (47 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (24 cases)
- Refused services or no further services (23 cases)
- Other reasons (23 cases)
- Does not require VR services (18 cases)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

## **Employer Recognition**

Michelle Levy, District Administrator, District 11, recognized Flamingo Gardens, a nonprofit botanical garden and wildlife sanctuary, for their commitment to the employment and recreational development of adults with visual impairments.

## **District Administrator Report: District 11**

Michelle Levy, District Administrator, presented the report.

- District 11 serves Broward County and is the only office in the Division to serve only one county. The district employs 11 individuals, 1 is visually impaired.
- 4 vacancies – (Human Services Program Consultant, Rehabilitation Technician, OPS Clerk, BBE Consultant)
- 3 Certified Rehabilitation Counselors- Linda Hernandez, Michelle Levy, Vickie Sykes.
- Since SFY 2015-16 district 11 has exceeded their VR goals.
- Strategies to Deliver Employment Goals:
  - The DA and Assistant DA hold weekly VR team meetings to share data with the VR team (VR Counselors, EPS). In addition, with new administrative support staff in place, they have started a new team competition complete with bulletin board showing visual progress toward goals.
  - Assistant DA, Carolyn Eleby has created Excel databases to track adult VR clients including those working at application, working, and attending training and other categories to ensure fluid and prompt services are delivered to ensure jobs are saved. These databases are reviewed and/or updated at the weekly meetings.
  - This District's Employment Placement Specialist and VR counselors utilize the resources of CareerSource Broward, Sunrise Chamber of Commerce, our vocational evaluators, mental health associations as much as possible to ensure clients' holistic needs are addressed.

## **Challenges:**

High cost of living, especially housing costs, homelessness and more retirees relocating to South Florida. Staff vacancies/ turnovers, and difficulties in recruitment have prevented the office from being fully staffed since 2019.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Lighthouse of Broward for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. (LHOB)**

Samantha Kelly Vice President of Programs presented the report.

- Lighthouse of Broward works in close partnership with DBS and feels incredibly lucky to have such a great local DBS office. This partnership makes things more seamless for the client and the team is able to be more productive.
- Lighthouse of Broward consists of 24 full-time employees and 10 part-time employees and an additional nine seasonal employees for summer programming.
  - Program staff offers the following certifications:
    - 2 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)
    - 5 Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)
    - 5 Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI)
    - 1 Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS)
    - 2 Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC)
    - 1 Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC)
- Last year Lighthouse of Broward were reaccredited by AVR.
- Over the past two years, LHOB transitioned back to in-person from strictly remote instruction. During this time, they expanded their Workforce Enterprise program to include a new work experience component.
- 50% of these participants who completed their work experience have been placed in permanent work at the completion of the work experience.
- In the Fall of 2022, new training opportunities were added for clients.
- These courses offer the clients a pathway to career and financial stability.
- The Transition aged clients returned to Florida Atlantic University for two one-week camp sessions on the campus. The students gain skills, experience, and the confidence they will need to help propel them into their future as college students.
- LHOB now has three APH code jumpers and has implemented teaching coding to all their summer campers. Students and their families also

participated in a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) event held at LHOB.

- LHOB are in the process of selling their building, this will allow for expansion of services, increase number of clients, and more centrally located.
- Unique clients served as of January 2023
  - Older Blind – 116
  - VR – 76
  - Transition- 27

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)**

Dr. Minna Jia presented this report. (cases closed between 2022-2023 Quarter 1)

- Survey Population: July 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022 – 216 clients
- Successful Closure – 127 Clients (38 Post Closure)
- Unsuccessful Closure –89 Clients
- Response rate: 26%, completions: 55
- Non-Working phone numbers 3, no answer 43, answering machine all the time 50.
- Among 55 respondents, 47 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- Among 55 respondents 60% (33) have successfully closed case while 40% (22) has unsuccessfully cases.
- The overall satisfaction level with DBS increased, while towards local service providers decreased.
- Accessibility of local service providers decreased.
- Increased number of clients came to DBS for Employment reasons (51% to 60%)
- Job Skills Services satisfaction level decreased for both DBS and local services providers.
- Job characteristics greatly improved for currently employed clients.
- After case closure awareness decreased.
- Impacts of COVID-19 no longer exist.
- Responsiveness increased compared with 2021 in the following area:



- DBS counselors informed them of rights and responsibilities as a client of the VR program: 96% (92%, 2021)
- DBS Counselors and local services providers made certain that they received services identified in their plan: 87% (84%, 2021)
- High levels of satisfaction with DBS training: at least 94% satisfaction level except for career counselling.
- Career counselling received a 71% satisfaction level, decreased from 100% in the previous year.
- Most helpful services
  - Training 41% (27%, 2021)
  - Equipment and technology support 27%
- Program improvements
  - Accessibility/Communication 21% (17%, 2021)
  - No improvements needed increased from 30% to 50%

### **Library /Rehabilitation Center Update**

Trina Travis, Deputy Director and Gerald “Jay” Boyle, Bureau Chief presented this report.

- A new Library Bureau Chief is planned to be identified soon.
- National Library Services Northern (NLS) and Southern Regional Conference
  - Duplication on Demand: instead of a single title on a single cartridge, all requests will be conveniently on one cartridge. A steady rotation is also in effect.
  - The goal is to have 20,000 active readers changed to the new system, 7,000 have been transitioned so far.
  - There has been great feedback from current active readers using the new system. Patrons enjoy having less items to keep track of and they’re enjoying the constant cycle flow of cartridges.
  - NLS network is divided into regions. This year, the northern and Southern regions are having a joint conference.
  - Conference Topics: Theme – Catch the Wave and Collaborate.
    - A sneak peek at the next evolution in talking book machines.
    - National Summer Reading Program
    - Youth Engagement Sessions
    - Collaborative Programming
    - Innovative Partnerships

- Assistive Technology

The Council expressed concern about how long it's taking Florida to become involved in the use of the Electronic Braille Reading Machine. It's important that patrons are not deprived of this opportunity too much longer and steps to make certain that program is implemented are done as soon as possible.

Maureen Dorosinski, Library Services Supervisor, informed the Council that the issue with the E readers is that the LMS can only send the entire allotment of Active Braille Readers at one time. They are not able to predict when and how many of each model they're going to get because the manufacturer doesn't know until they receive the chips in house to create the machines. It is LMS hope that Florida is served by the end of 2023.

The Council expressed concern about the Bard account deactivation time frame.

Maureen Dorosinski informed the Council that the BARD account security is set by the Library of Congress. Patrons will need to log into their account at least once every 30 days to remain active.

Jay Boyle, Bureau Chief of the Rehabilitation Center of the Blind informed the Council of the Rehab Center's progress since he's been a part of the team.

- Technology training is advancing.
- Total number of clients has increased. Currently 25 including 5 that are in BEP training and 3 are working virtually.
- The name change is currently waiting to be approved. The new name of the Rehab Center will be "The Career Technology and Training Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Chief Boyle implemented 12 committees:
  - Student Manual
  - Staff Training
  - Equipment Updates
  - Campus Revisions
  - Independent Living
  - Student Recognition
  - Vacant Positions
  - New Brochures
  - Client Referrals

- Residential Living
- Community Outreach
- Employee Retreat

The Council inquired about the number of Mobility Instructors at the Rehab Center.

Chief Boyle informed the Council that there is currently one Mobility Instructors. Kimberly Bonnet and himself assist in this area when needed. A new Mobility Instructor is expected to start soon. The Mobility Instructor position was reclassified to be competitive with the market.

- New Programs to be offered at the Rehab Center:
  - CompTIA Center
  - Accessibility Apprenticeship Program
  - Call Center
  - Access Technology
  - Pre-Employment Program – “Energized for Employment”

Family Day will also be reimplemented.

### **Broward County Transportation Department**

Paul Strobis, Director, Paratransit Division presented this report.

- Penny sales tax has been implemented to help fund the future of transportation systems in Broward County.
- Braille systems and a premium rapid bus system are looking to be fulfilled.
- During COVID ridership decreased 80%. Broward County paratransit program has returned to about 93%.
- Riders Choice Program - well received by visually impaired customers, instead of the advanced reservation system for paratransit ride sharing on a vehicle, Broward County has offered a payment card that will be subsidized up to \$18.00 for a private taxi trip in community.
- Paratransit services are offered 6 days a week Monday - Saturday 4:30am – 12:40am and Sunday 6:30am – 10:30pm.
- Currently 15,000 registered paratransit customers, about 3200 transported daily.
- Challenges:
  - Driver shortages

- National shortage of vehicle chassis
- Future Projects:
  - build an operating facility for paratransit operation.
  - Mobility Training Center

The Council inquired about electric vehicles for the ride sharing program.

The average mileage of an electric vehicle would be about 90 miles. 3 electric vehicles for every one current vehicle would need to be purchased. There is no comparable range vehicle to transition into as of yet. The other issue is the infrastructure required to charge those vehicles. On the other hand, Broward County is moving towards electric buses. They are starting to be put in place and pledged to not buy anymore diesel buses. Plans for 100% electric buses by 2035.

The Council inquired about the “on time” performance since there is a shortage of drivers.

Mr. Strobis informed the Council that there is a 92% “on time” goal. They are currently at 86% over the past 60 days.

### **Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) Report**

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman Douglas Ingram presented an update.

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman Ingram joined the FRC in their most recent meeting. He observed how the meeting ran, found it be a lot of intersectionality between both organizations, and suggested the collaboration between FRC and FRCB continues.

Suggested Replications:

- A new communications system.

The Council inquired about FRC interaction in Public Forum.

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman Ingram informed the Council that there was limited interaction due to the location of the meeting being in Tallahassee.

The Council allowed time for public comment.

The Council agreed to make a decision in the New Business segment of the agenda.

Councilman Robert Kelly reminded the Council that the strength of Florida has been the partnerships amongst the state agencies, the private agencies, and the consumer groups . He also reminded the Council of a previous conversation held about resumption of the summits that were designed originally to promote communication among DBS, the CRPs, and the consumers.

### **Agenda Amendment**

The agenda was amended for an election process. Sophia Eccleston motioned to retain elected officers in their positions until February (first meeting of the calendar year), when a new election will be held. Roxann Mayros seconded the motion. The motion passed.

### **Agenda Items for May 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> 2023**

- Florida Agencies Serving the Blind Presentation
- Legislative Report
- Lakeland Transit
- Committee Appointments

### **February 2024 Meeting**

Paul Edwards made a motion to have the February 2024 meeting in Tallahassee, FL. Sophia Eccleston second. The motion was passed.

The dates were set for February 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

The Council held a discussion about creating an agenda and visiting the Florida Representatives while in Tallahassee February 2024. By consolidating legislative days amongst consumer groups and the CRPs on one day, it will create a bigger impact. A planning committee will be appointed at the next quarterly meeting.

Roxann Mayros made a motion to change the dates of the February 2024 meeting to include a legislative day to February 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Douglas Ingram seconded the motion. The motion passed.

## **Old Business**

Paul Martinez requested an update on Rehab Council application accessibility that was discussed during the previous meeting. Director Doyle reported that applicants could contact Brandis Hall for assistance and that a request was made to the team to make the application accessible. Hernandez requested that Brandis Hall send the accessible document to the council members.

Bruce Miles requested Paul Edwards to speak about the DSO and bring the new Bikers Care posters to the next council meeting.

## **New Business**

Councilmen Sead Bekric presented concerns regarding the Business Enterprise Program for new clients going through BEP training in Daytona. Not receiving adequate tools for on-the-job training (laptops, notetakers, magnifiers). Asking for client services to provide tools for the trainees for OJT.

Director Doyle shared that there is a standard division policy that will not allow purchase equipment for keeps unless the client is in college or already have a job. Tools can be purchased and available for loan, the policy relating to loaning equipment will be revisited.

Bekric discussed a model laptop necessary with equipment on it through regional consultant. The Region can provide it to trainers.

Director Doyle agreed with feasibility and will to follow-up with Councilman Bekric help determine what equipment is needed. Jorge asked that this also be coordinated with the district offices.

## **Open Discussion**

Councilwoman Sophia Eccleston requested that Brandis give a quick update of the travel process, a detailed update was given.

## **Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA)**

Chaz Compton presented to the Council.

- Purpose to identify specific areas of unmet needs of individuals with disabilities being served in the United States across multiple topic areas.  
Topic areas:
  - The overall performance of the organization
  - The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supportive employment.
  - The needs of unserved or underserved individuals or individuals categorized as minorities by law.
  - Needs of youth in transition
  - Need to enhance or develop community rehabilitation programs in the state.
  - How effectively is the workforce development system serving individuals with blindness or visual impairment in Florida.
  - The effectiveness of the agency in serving the needs of employers in recruiting, hiring, retaining, and accommodating individuals with blindness or visual impairment.

The assessment is conducted via surveys developed for individuals being served, businesses, staff, and partners. In-person interviews will be conducted with the same groups, either individually or in focus groups. Interviews will also be carried out via Zoom for those not available while the assessment team is in Florida. Data analysis is performed by national and state level data and by agency specific data from the agency's case management system. Data is compiled into a report that provides recommendations on how to more effectively meet the needs of individuals with blindness or visual impairments in Florida.

Councilwoman Roxann Mayros asked for a projected timeframe for completion of the CNA. Chaz Compton informed the council that completion takes approximately nine months, with the report being finished by the end of Calendar Year 2023.

Doug Ingram questioned if the categories of race and disability type for the underserved groups are preset criteria or if they are also looking at the economic group. Chaz confirmed that many possibilities exist depending on what the

agency suggests being researched. The three main groups, however, are race, geography, and disability type.

Paul Edwards proposed that data on how the lack of transportation in rural areas inhibit employability of individuals who are blind or visually impaired be an additional component added to the assessment.

### **CSAVR Report**

Director Doyle provided a brief review.

A large focus of CSAVR meeting addressed fiscal matters. RSA is concerned about states not utilizing funds as they should nationally. Regional meetings cover state operation such as case management and staffing. CSAVR are also working on three strategic priorities, two of the three are:

- Recruiting
- Streamlining Processes

Vocational Rehab did the best of all workforce programs during COVID. During National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) meeting, a presentation was given that took all the national data and presented it to the attendees based on blind agencies. Director Doyle will send out the PowerPoint to the council.

Next conference will be held in April in Bethesda, MD.

Vice Chairman Donte Mickens reported on his attendance at National Council of State Rehab Council conference. The NCSRC discussion focused on council recruitment, training, retention, public forum engagement, and best practices for public involvement. No formal actions were taken.

Jorge asked if the process for council appointments was addressed. Donte informed the Council that it is a challenge for many states, but not across the board. The general question asked was “can someone continue to serve until a new appointment is made?”. Florida shared its experience. Mainly the consensus recommended maintaining relationships with the appointment office. Donte will forward best practices and general guidelines to Brandis once received.

Bruce Miles motioned to adjourn. Motion carried.  
The meeting adjourned.