

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
Four Points by Sheraton Downtown Tallahassee
316 W. Tennessee St. Tallahassee, FL
February 8 - 9, 2024

Council Members Present

- Arthur Moody
- Bruce Miles
- Ciawanda McDonald
- Denise Valkema
- Donte Mickens
- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Paul Edwards
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly

Council Members Virtual Participation

- Sophia Eccleston
- Patricia Lipovsky

Council Members Absent

- Sead Bekric
- Paul Martinez

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

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

Adoption of Agenda

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

Approval of October 2023 Meeting Minutes

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept October 26th – 27th 2023, meeting minutes with corrections. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle yielded time to senior Chancellor Kimberly Richey:

Overseeing the higher education and the workforce programs at the Department of Education, Kimberly Richey, Senior Chancellor at the Department of Education, shared a brief introduction with the Council. Chancellor Richey key points:

- 100% committed to stakeholder involvement
- No policy will be implemented unless it benefits individuals with disabilities
- Focus on improving outcomes, furthering independence, increasing employment outcomes for individuals who are blind.
 - The Council was curious of Chancellor Richey's thoughts on the value of separateness of DBS services as an agency.
 - Chancellor Richey assured the Council that she'll always advocate for doing what is best to serve blind and visually impaired individuals.

Outreach

- Director Doyle recognized consumer groups and staff for their assistance in the Tallahassee Day event.
- Career Success Campaign launched on January 2, 2024
- Moore Communication will give a in depth report at the May FRCB meeting

Staff

- Director Doyle recognized DBS staff for work anniversaries and Birthdays.
- Staff salaries - implemented 2 phases of staff increases: currently working on the final phase.

Legislative Budget

- Legislature picked up on many of those things that were in the governor's recommended budget, and these items current appear in legislative working budget papers.
- Request \$5.7 million for provider rate increases
- Request for funds for both GR match funds and for federal trust fund authority.

- Request for \$500,000 for older blind program
- Request for \$2.2 million for the children's program
- Request for \$1.3 million to provide funds to Community Rehabilitation Programs for adjustment to blindness counselors.
- Request for about \$8 million for additional authority for users utilizing federal dollars.

Needs Assessment - Chaz Compton joined in for a brief update

- 509 surveys completed for this assessment, 69 individual interviews, and 137 people interviewed as part of 29 focus groups.
- 715 participants that contributed either by survey or.
- CSNA evaluates the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual impairments. It is not a monitoring review by RSA, not an audit, and not an enforcement process.
- CSNA looks at performance of agencies, needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, needs of individuals who are minorities or have been underserved, needs of youth and transition, effectiveness in the larger workforce development system, develop, enhance, or establish or improve community rehabilitation programs in the state, and effectiveness of the agency in serving employers and the needs of businesses in terms of recruiting, hiring, retaining and accommodating individuals with blindness or vision impairments.

A full assessment report will be provided to the Council once finalized.

Gifts and Donations

Making available \$250,000 through the program this year, the intent is to release the request for proposals on March 29th. A timeline was shared with the Council and applications will be on May 10. Applications will be screened, and the goal is to have all contracts signed by September 1st. Up to \$50,000 per individual project.

Regarding Fair Hearing Reports to the Council – after internal communication, DOE staff clarified that the requirements to submit the reports to the Council are no longer law. However, a redacted report can be provided to the Council upon request.

- Paul Edwards made a motion to include any fair hearings and other complaints that rise to the level that the Council needs to know about in

the Director's report instead of receiving a redacted report. Robert Kelly seconded the motion. Discussions were had. The motion carried.

DBS Employment Report

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

Quarter 2 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served Q2 3784.
- 405 closed cases of which 139 were successful.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 48%
- The average hourly wage is \$19.50
- The highest wage is \$28.00.
- The lowest wage is \$11.00.

The top 3 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (97 cases)
- Other reasons (41)
- Refused services or no further services (31 cases)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

- The Council inquired about the West Palm Beach area unsuccessful closures.
 - Chief Giles informed the Council of various reason for the number of unsuccessful closures in the WPB area, including cost of living and clients relocating to another state.

State Plan

Chief Bridget Giles provided an update on the state plan. The core partners decided to move from a unified state plan to a combined state plan for 2024-2028. The plan is due to RSA on March 4, 2024. CareerSource Florida requested an extension to March 29. CareerSource will open the state plan for public comments on February 23, 2024. The public comments will remain open for two weeks. Anyone who wishes to provide feedback can visit CareerSource Florida's website to leave comments.

Florida's Big Data Report

Jason Eckert, Vice President of VisionServe Alliance, presented this report

What is the Big Data Project?

- Stand-alone state reports that include national data and analysis, estimating the prevalence of blindness and low vision at the state and county levels.
- Stand-alone state reports describing social, economic, health, and quality of life factors at state level among people who are blind and have low vision in each of the eight labor force categories, including those who are working, not working, or out of the labor force; and compared to older people without blindness and low vision.

Goals of Big Data Project

- Better understand the social, economic, and health characteristics of people reporting blindness and low vision.
- Better understand the prevalence of chronic conditions, quality of life, and disability characteristics in each category.
- Inform the development of policies and interventions to improve work opportunities.

Only study to examine health, chronic conditions, health-related quality of life, and disability measures among people who are blind and have low vision at the state level.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Wayne Jennings, District Administrator, District 2, recognized Amazon, and House of Cars.

District 2 Administrator Report

Wayne Jennings, District Administrator, presented this report.

- District 2 covers 11 counties.
- Most rural out of all DBS districts.
- Participates in monthly marketing and outreach activities to increase referrals as well as reaching unserved and underserved populations.
- Exceeds VR goal every year and eligibility/plan timeframes as well as the overall rehab rate.
- Office consists of 10 staff positions, 2 staff members who are visually impaired and/or blind.

- For FY 2023-2024, District 2 has been assigned a goal of 43 successfully rehabilitated VR closures.
- YTD successfully employed and closed 30 clients.
- An additional 11 cases in employed status.
- Expected to add another 7 successful closures to meet the Districts self-assigned goal of 50 Successful closures.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Lighthouse of the Big Bend, Inc. (LBB)

Tina Torrance, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

The mission of LBB is to enhance the lives of individuals who live with vision loss in the Big Bend area through direct services, community engagement, and education.

Services include early intervention for babies and children up to 5 years of age with training in assistive technology, communication skills, activities of daily living, braille, orientation and mobility.

LBB is currently serving:

- Blind Babies – 12
- Transition – 21
- Independent Living/Older Blind – 102

Starting in March 2024, LBB will host a Family COMS clinic each month. The clinic will be held on the last Saturday of each month at the LBB offices in Tallahassee. The clinic's focus will be orientation and mobility training for clients.

- The Council inquired about the amount of visually impaired staff from LBB
 - There are 3 visually impaired staff members.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (ASB)

Amy Grissom, Chief Executive Officer, presented the report.

ASB was awarded the \$2.2 million for the children's program last legislative session and doubled the number of clients served in the first two quarters.

- 235 students served this year compared to less than 100 served last year.
- Cumulative average of 4.5 hours per client per month being seen.
- 38 new referrals and 99% of them have been given their assessment within 30 days.
- 227 out of 235 students showed functional gain from entry into the program until December 2023.
- In addition to other funds, each student is given on average \$900 a year for equipment.
- The Transition Summer Summit will return with expansions.
- Summit dates June 17th – 21st, 2024.
- 10 out of 16 agencies are participating.
 - Council inquired about billable services regarding the Summit.
 - Amy Grissom insured that the summit is not the typical conference and will be a billable service.

StarMetro Transportation

Allie Merzer Fleming, Manager, Special Transit Projects & Communications, presented this report.

- Provided over 2.2 million trips on fixed routes in 2022.
- Coordinated 115,000 paratransit and door-to-door trips in 2022.
- Improved Application for Transportation Assistance.
- Provides essential services and assists with emergency response.
- Southside Transit Center breaking ground in 2024.

Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged

David Darm, Executive Director, presented this report.

In 1979, Legislature created the program to be “fully responsive to the needs” of this population. Legislature created Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged CTD and TD Trust Fund in 1989. The purpose was to “coordinate” transportation services in each county in Florida.

Implemented by three primary entities at local level:

- Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) – Oversees the delivery of TD services in designated county or multi-county area.
- Planning Agency (Planner) – Coordinates planning activities for local TD program.
- Local Coordinating Board (LCB) – Represents stakeholders and advises on the delivery of TD services.

CTD also works with state/local partners or “purchasing agencies” to coordinate funding for these services. Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund Revenues for FY23-24 are \$61,693,461.

Committee Report

Paul Edwards provided a brief report for the Tallahassee Day subcommittee.

- February 2024 Tallahassee Day was a success.
- Folders were created that shared information about the various consumer organizations, Blind Services Foundation, FRCB, and DBS .
- Teams met with staff at the Capitol.
- Moving forward the Tallahassee Day group will develop a system that will better serve the purpose of the mission. Including:
 - Visiting legislators before legislative session
 - Determine what is being asked from the legislators.
 - Adopt some approaches from partnering consumer organizations in terms of preparing for the visit.

Bruce Miles provided a brief report from the Satisfaction Survey Subcommittee.

Regarding additional survey questions:

- Started with five samples from different local service providers.
- Received a list of potential question from Dr. Jia and DBS
- Committee will review questions prior to meeting
- It is expected that 20 – 25 questions will be added.
- Next meeting is February 14th, 2024.

Jorge Hernandez provided a brief report from the Employment Subcommittee.

- Committee received a list of employers recognized in the past 6 years.
- The committee will look into ways to expand relationships and employment services.
 - Apprenticeships
 - Call Centers

October 27, 2023

Council Members Present

- Arthur Moody
- Bruce Miles
- Ciawanda McDonald
- Denise Valkema
- Donte Mickens
- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Paul Edwards
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly

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Council Staff

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Agenda Items for May 1st – 3rd 2024

- State Plan
- Needs Assessment
- CAP Report
- Visit CRP (Lighthouse of SW Florida)
- Gift & Donations
- RSA Update
- Sub-Committee Reports
- Public Transportation
- Appointments

February 2025 Meeting

Paul Edwards motioned to have February 2025 meeting in Tallahassee, FL. Doug Ingram seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Possible dates are January 28th - 31st 2025, or February 4th - 7th 2025.

The dates will be finalized at the May 2024 meeting.

Unfinished Business

Robert Kelly encouraged DBS to share the Needs Assessment report with the Council in advance so that the Council could adequately review and provide input.

Donte Mickens suggested establishing a Public Forum Committee which he will oversee.

New Business

A Public Forum Committee was established. Donte Mickens, Denise Valkema, Misty Porter, Ciawanda McDonald, and Arthur Moody.

Paul Edwards read a letter for the Council to endorse that would be forwarded to the Board of Directors at Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (FASB).

Robert Kelly motioned that the letter be approved. Bruce Miles seconded. Further discussions were had. The motion did not pass. The Council agreed to revise the letter and meet at a later date to review and approve the letter before being submitted to FASB.

Open Discussion

The Council held a brief discussion about meeting notices and appointments, and travel arrangements.

Chairman Hernandez reminded the Council of attendance requirements according to the FRCB By-Laws.

Councilman Moody presented a brief report from the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils Conference Fall 2023. Arthur Moody will forward the report and Disability Rights Florida newsletter link to Brandis to share with the Council.

The Council agreed to have a CAP report be added to all subsequent agendas.

Elections

Patricia Lipovsky nominated Doug Ingram for Chair. No further nominations for Chair were given. Patricia motioned to declare Doug elected. Bruce Miles seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Doug Ingram nominated Jorge Hernandez for Vice Chair. No further nominations for Vice Chair were given. Doug motioned to declare Jorge elected. Robert Kelly seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Paul Edwards nominated Donte Mickens for Second Vice Chair. No further nominations for Vice Chair were given. Paul motioned to declare Donte elected. Denise Valkema seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Doug Ingram motioned to adjourn. Arthur Moody seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.