

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
DoubleTree by Hilton Fort Myers at Bell Tower Shops
13051 Bell Tower Dr., Fort Myers, Fl. 33907
May 1 - 3, 2024

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Virtual Participation

- Sead Bekric
- Paul Edwards
- Patricia Lipovsky

Council Members Absent

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Paul Martinez

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

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

Adoption of Agenda

Chairman Doug Ingram suggested amending the agenda to add a five-minute DSO announcement. The amendment was accepted. Bruce Miles made a motion to

accept the meeting's amended agenda. Denise Valkema second the motion. Motion passed.

Approval of February 2024 Meeting Minutes

Robert Kelly made a motion to accept February 2024, meeting minutes. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report to the council:

Staff

- Director Doyle recognized DBS staff for work anniversaries and birthdays.

Legislative Budget

- Overall successful legislative session, ending with approximately a 20% increase over base budget. Increases included provider rate increases, budget authority for Tyndall AFB, adjustment to blindness counseling, and the older blind program.
- Legislature included \$1,000,000 for Conklin Davis Center, supporting Supported Employment, Independent Living, and HVAC upgrades .
- Program Rate Increases per client:
 - Chairman Ingram asked, "Is there an accounting that shows the rate of disbursement and how much of the original grant has been used up and possibility of some additional funding coming in to continue that program?"
 - Brandis will forward this information to the Council once received.

RSA Monitoring

- Corrective action plan due May 17th.
- Director gave a brief summary of the findings.
 - Internal Controls.
 - Period of Performance.
 - Insufficient Accounting of Expenditures.
 - Contracts.

Gifts and Donations

The timeline on the planned procurement for the gifts and donations where entities are able to submit solicitations for funded projects through the Division will be adjusted.

- Making available \$250,000.
- Up to \$50,000 per individual project.
- Innovation Projects are also desired.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

- Connected with 715 people.
- 509 completed surveys.
- 206 individuals were interviewed.
- Vacancy rate was a concern.
- Business Enterprise cited as a strength.
- Transportation challenges.
- Underserved areas.

DBS Employment Report

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented this report for quarter 3.

Quarter 3 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served Q3 3914.
- 474 closed cases of which 221 were successful.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 60%
- The average hourly wage is \$20.35
- The highest wage is \$67.00.
- The lowest wage is \$9.81.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

- The Council inquired about the unsuccessful closures.

Chief Giles informed the Council the overall unsuccessful closure rate was down. Attributing to this, among other things, increased communication, more meetings with our clients, more face-to-face meetings, and EPS training. Being unable to locate clients is one of the leading causes to unsuccessful closures.

Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (ASB)

Lisa Howard, Interim Chief Executive Officer, presented the report.

Although there have been many changes within FASB, its commitment to the Council to be a partner in advocacy, continue collaboration, and to strengthen its goals for partnership remain the same.

- The Council inquired about what they can do to be more supportive to ASB. Lisa Howard suggested a representative from the Council attend and sometimes present at their quarterly meeting, which has been changed to coincide with FRCB quarterly meetings.
- The Council held a brief conversation on the functional things that are essential; back to real communication, identifying issues that both organizations can work on together on, and some opportunity to air out and try to resolve differences where they may be.

Employer Recognition

Leigh Ann Bellamy, District Administrator, District 9, recognized Lee County North Fort Myers Library .

District 9 Administrator Report

Leigh Ann Bellamy, District Administrator, presented this report.

- The Fort Myers office serves Lee, Collier, Hendry, Glades County while the Palmetto office serves Manatee, Sarasota, Highlands, and DeSoto County. Both offices provide services to Charlotte County.
- The district staffs a total of 14 full-time employees and 1 OPS reader/driver. The district currently employs two visually impaired and /or blind staff members.
- District 9 has consistently exceeded its annual goal for successful rehabilitations for more than 17 years.
- For SFY 2022-2023 the district was assigned a goal of 84 successful VR closures and closed 92 or 109% of goal. It's expected to close between 91-111 cases for the 2023-2024 year.
- Three CRPs provide services for DBS clients:
 - Lighthouse of Southwest Florida is in North Fort Myers and serves Lee, Hendry and Glades County.
 - Lighthouse of Collier is in Naples and provides services to Collier County.

- Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center is in Bradenton and provides services to Manatee, Sarasota, Highlands, DeSoto and Charlotte Counties.
- The Council inquired about how the district navigates conversation with clients living in the more rural areas. DA Bellamy informed the council that though those conversations can be tricky, if clients don't have a plan and are willing to relocate, once employment is found relocating expenses will be covered.
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A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Lighthouse Vision Loss Education Center

Alexandra Elman Foley, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

One of the centers initiatives moving forward is to become 100% accessible internally so that we can be the exemplary for the Community. Alexandra presented a fully accessible PowerPoint to the Council.

Major Services Provided By The Organization.

- Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Independent Living.
- Orientation & Mobility.
- Adjustment to Vision Loss.
- Assistive Technology.

During Florida State Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the following contracts will end on June 30, 2024:

- Department of Education, Division, Blind Services, Contract (Non-State Term) No. 24-523, Independent Living-Older Blind. Department of Education, Division, Blind Services, Contract No. 24-573, Independent Living-Adult Program.
- The Council expressed appreciation for the fully accessible PowerPoint presentation provided by Alexandra.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Lighthouse for Blindness & Low Vision of Collier County

Scott Flagel, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

- Currently celebrating 15 years of service.
- Staff includes 8 full-time and 2 part-time. More than 30% of the staff experience varying degrees of visual impairment or blindness.
- 2 clients were brought on board as staff after successful completion of services at Lighthouse of Collier.
- The Lighthouse of Collier recently received a two-year grant from Naples Children & Education Foundation (NCEF), founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival. The Early Intervention & Children’s Program at Lighthouse will directly benefit from the NCEF grant.
- Children’s camp and Transition camp that will occur in June.
- The Council inquired about recruiting process of staff when it comes to language barriers. Scott informed the Council that although it is not a requirement, 50% of the staff is bilingual in English and Spanish.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Client Satisfaction Survey

Dr. Minna Jia, presented this report.

- Survey Population: July 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023 – 304 clients.
- Successful Closure – 133 Clients (1 Post Closure).
- Among 72 respondents, 66 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- 68% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment.
- DBS overall satisfaction: 91%.
- Local service providers overall satisfaction: 81%.
- After case closure awareness decreased.
- Clients expressed the following needs and improvements from DBS.
 - More in-person job training.
 - Provisions for housing .
 - Financial training .
 - Technology training.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Bruce Miles presented a Guide Dog poster provided by the Florida Blind Services Foundation. The posters are available for distribution. The Council encouraged everyone to contact Brandis Hall or Bruce Miles directly for posters.

May 3, 2024

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

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- Brandis Hall

Committee Report

Jorge Hernandez provided a brief report from the Employment Subcommittee.

- Committee plans to meet before July meeting to discuss further advancements.
- The committee will look into ways to expand relationships and employment services.
 - Apprenticeships.
 - Call Centers.

Donte Mickens provided a brief report from the Public Forum Subcommittee.

- Some ideas have already been incorporated as far as communication.

- The goal is to have increased participation.
- In most recent forum there were more active callers than in the recent past, appreciation was given to those who worked to get documents and notices out.

Bruce Miles provided a brief report from the Satisfaction Survey Subcommittee. Regarding additional survey questions:

- 18 questions were developed for the Survey.
- Minna and Robert Doyle will discuss logistics.
- Committee plan to meet in 6 months to assess survey results.
- Robert Kelly motioned to approve the 18 questions Jorge Hernandez seconded. With no objections, the questions were approved.

Client Assistance Program Report

Arthur Moody provided a brief report.

- last quarter held 135 CAP cases, 10 were from clients of DBS.
 - 4 out of 10 clients were referrals and 2 out of the 4 were former clients.
 - 2 cases experienced a hard time reconnecting.
 - 1 case needed help with counselor-client relationship.
 - 1 case for Assistant Technology Access.
 - 2 cases communication breakdown.
 - 1 case for denial of education.
 - 1 case about training.
- Of the 10 cases 3 were from Duval, 1 in Pinellas, 1 in Miami Dade, 1 in St. John, 1 in Manatee, 1 in Osceola, 1 in Palm Beach, and 1 in Orange.

Agenda Items for July 2024

- CAP Report.
- Gift & Donations .
- State Awards.
- Client Satisfaction Report.
- RSA Update.
- Policy Update.
- ABLE United.
- FIMC Report.
- Sub-Committee Reports.
- Conklin Center Report.

May 2025 Meeting

Denise Valkema motioned to have May 2025 meeting in Ocala, FL. Arthur Moody seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Dates are May 7th - 9th 2025.

Unfinished Business

Director Doyle informed the council that the State Plan has been submitted and approved by the CareerSource Board of Directors and is currently in a review process by US Department of Education and US Department of Labor. The Council will review and discuss the approved State Plan at the next quarterly meeting.

New Business

Patricia Liposky joined the Public Forum Subcommittee.

Jorge Hernandez presented a brief reports from the National Council of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC).

- Certified Employment Professionals are looking to see more credentials from people with disabilities.
- RSA attended and brought attention to funds being pulled from the Vocational Rehabilitation on a federal level.
- More visually impaired participants were in attendance.

Patricia Lipovsky inquired about the Career, Technology, and Training Center. Director Doyle informed the Council that the Jay Boyle, Bureau Chief, retired April 26, 2024. The agency is currently seeking applicants.

Jorge Hernandez requested a report from the Conklin Davis Center be added to the July 2024 agenda.

Patricia requested a report from the Braille and Talking Book Library, Bureau Chief, Nicole Sanders, be added to the July 2024 agenda.

Open Discussion

A brief discussion was held about having a representative from the FRCB attend the quarterly meetings of the Florida Rehabilitation Council and report back to the FRCB.

The council held a brief discussion on additional methods to send reports to the Council. Brandis will explore the One-Drive method in the future.

Jorge Hernandez motioned to adjourn. Denise Valkema seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.