

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando Downtown
60 South Ivanhoe Blvd., Orlando, FL 32804
July 24th-26th, 2024

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Absent

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Paul Martinez
- Sead Bekric

Council Staff Stand-in

- Alexandra Diggs

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

Adoption of Agenda

Patricia Lipovsky made a motion to accept the agenda. Jorge Hernandez second the motion. Motion passed.

Approval of May 2024 Meeting Minutes

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept May 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 successful client closures.
- 855 successful closures for FY 2023-2024.
- George Rosario closed 70 cases and was recognized as DOE Employee of the month.
- District 12-Miami had the highest successful closures (183).
- One district did not meet their goal for the year.
- Challenges mentioned-vacancies, transportation (rural) and closing cases due to end of fiscal year.

Legislative Budget

- Successful legislative session, ending with approximately a 20% increase over base budget. Increases included provider rate increases, budget authority for Tyndall AFB for bidding, and the older blind program.
- 14.7% after changes and Governor's vetoes
 - Adjustment to Blindness Counseling (\$1.5mil)-not included in the budget.
- Current Budget is \$71 million up from \$62 million.
- Future budget needs include obtaining budget authority.
- The Miami lighthouse received \$150,000 for senior group activity programs.
- The Lighthouse of the Blind Pasco received \$50,000 for programs and services.
- The Lighthouse of Collier received \$150,000.
- The legislature awarded an \$1,000,000 for Conklin Davis Center, supporting Supported Employment, Independent Living, and HVAC upgrades.

National Level (RSA)

- DBS federal budget did not receive an automatic increase for VR funding this year.
- Grant can be rolled over to the next fiscal year; to be allotted.
- Social Security reimbursements reached over \$3 million; counts against budget authority.
- Congress expresses challenges as VR agencies haven't spent full funding..

Conflict Resolution

- 50 inquiries from May through July 2024
- Broken down into three categories:

- (39) Simple- 1-2 phone calls to clear up misunderstanding.
 - (8) Intermediate- District Involved consist of 4 phone calls or more to resolve the challenge presented.
 - (1) More Complex- Administrative Hearing.
- The Council inquired about salary changes for those not included in previous wage increases. Director Doyle informed the Council that DBS has completed all wage increases and reclassifications.

DBS Employment Report

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented this report for quarter 4.

Quarter 4 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served Q4 3920.
- 649 closed cases of which 414 were successful.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 76%.
- The average hourly wage is \$19.15.
- The highest wage is \$69.23.
- The lowest wage is \$11.30.

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.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Business Enterprise

Bill Findley, Bureau Chief, presented the report.

Updates SFY 2023-2024 (07/01/2023-06/30/2024)

- Vendors completed: 9.
- Business Enterprise Vendors awarded first facility: 5.
- Current Licensed Vendors Total: 104.
- Averaging Earning FY 2023 is \$93,000.
- Median Earning FY 2023 is \$87,000.
- Total Operating Facilities:
 - 15 micro-markets.
 - 2-3 planned.

- 4 Veteran Affairs Medical Centers.
- Processing Centers.
- Florida Welcome Centers.
- 20-25 Veteran Affairs Community Based Outpatient Clinics.

Vendor Annual Sales

- Annual Sales: \$24 million excluding three military contracts (\$4.5million in contract value).

Food Service Challenges

- 104 vendors serve 130 facilities.
- Vendors operating 2-4 facilities due to shortages.
- Hiring Challenges.
- State building population.

Future Endeavors

- Cameras at rest stops
 - First two installations in Jefferson County Rest Areas.
 - Looking to add more cameras (equipment & installation cost \$5-\$6K).
- State Parks
 - Laundry Machines.
 - First vendor laundry machine installed in Topsails Hill Preserve State Park in September and another location in the future.
- Arbitrations
 - Elgin Air Force Base February 2025
 - Submitting proposal for full food service.
 - Plan to combine Elgin & Hurlburt Field.
- Tyndall Air Force Base
 - Reason for selecting someone is not consistent with the Randolph-Shepherd Act.

Client Satisfaction Survey

Dr. Minna Jia presented this report.

- Survey Population: July 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024– 531 clients.
- Among 156 respondents, 141 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- 71% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment.

- DBS overall satisfaction: 91%.
- Local service providers overall satisfaction: 91%.
- After case closure awareness decreased.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS)

Alice Schmitges, Bureau Chief, presented this report.

The mission of Florida’s Early Learning-20 education system shall be to increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system, by allowing them the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents and communities.

- Goals:
 - Highest student achievement
 - Seamless articulation and maximum access
 - Skilled workforce and economic development
 - Quality efficient services
- Teachers of students who are visually impaired have been prepared to meet the unique individual needs of students and provide specialized instruction by earning a specialized degree, meeting state requirements and becoming certified.
- A full individual and evaluation must be conducted by a school district to identify a student with a visual impairment as eligible for exceptional student education and consider the individual needs of a student with a visual impairment when developing, reviewing, or revising an Individual Educational Plan.
 - The Council inquired about the criteria for determining services and the use of Braille. Gwen Black joined Ms. Schmitges, informing the Council that apart of recent corrective measures, a full individual evaluation to verify eligibility is assessed once medical report is received. Use of Braille is emphasized through the learning media assessment.
 - The Council inquired about visually impaired students not being able to access technical devices used to obtain the curriculum throughout the

- school year to assist with end of the year testing (such as screen readers). BEESS was unable to comment on the matter.
- The Council inquired about the lack of trained teachers for the visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialist. Ms. Schmitges informed the Council that the Department is working on a report for Senate Bill 7002, with an area specifically around recruitment and retention for ESE and other related services for special education.

Employer Recognition

Ed James, District Administrator, District 6, recognized Walgreens as well as Dreamie Cookies (Jack Pinnock, CEO).

District 6 Administrator Report

Ed James, District Administrator, presented this report.

- The district staffs a total of 20 full-time employees and 2 OPS readers/driver. The district currently employs 4 visually impaired and /or blind staff members.
- For SFY 2023-2024 met goal of 103 VR successful closures.
- The Council inquired about District 6 challenges. Ed James informed the Council the cost of services including technology has risen. Current CRP's not offering job placement, and labor work interest.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

New Vision for Independence Inc.,

Chantel Buck, President, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

- Serving Lake and Sumter Counties and The Villages retirement community which includes a pocket of Marion County.
- 7 full-time and 6 part-time employees, including 5 who are visually impaired.
- Offer by-phone support services to anyone with a visual impairment, regardless of their case status with DBS or their location.

- 2 Spanish-speaking employees added to team to begin deliberate outreach to underserved populations in service area.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Braille and Talking Book Library

Nicole Sanders, Bureau Chief, presented this report.

- Changed over all of our patrons to duplication (multiple books on one cartridge).
- Distributed the Braille E-Readers from the National Library Service.
- 210 patrons currently use those E readers.
- Added national magazines to circulation out of the Daytona Regional Library.
- Current active reader count across the state is at about 23,708.
- Work is being done on a state and federal level to improve outreach and retention.

Past Year Statistics

- Circulation Department mailed out 1,834,084 Braille and audio titles.
- Readers Services Department handled a 15,202 phone calls and over 16,000 emails in addition to regular mail talking book topic order forms and walk in patrons.
- Volunteer Machine Repair Group refurbished 1145 machines.
- Production team recorded 17 books and 78 anthologies and magazines. Produced over 71,000 Braille or large print newsletters and event notifications and reviewed and updated over 36,000 catalog records.
- Florida patrons have downloaded 311,000 and 40 Braille and audio books off of Bard.

Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (ASB)

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

- Executive Committee: Alexandra Foley (President), Anisa (Vice President), Stephanie Pontlitz. (Treasure), Chantel Buck (Secretary), Raven Halloway (at Large Seat), Kyle Johnson (at Large Seat)
- ASB created a Child Program Task Force lead by Anisa Pieriboni. Recent contract closed on June 30, 2024.

- 262 children participated in the children's programs in 38 counties.
- Over 15,000 hours of work provided.
- Systems Committee - focusing on issues that all of our agencies have together. Such as finding, keeping creating more certified staff.

ABLE United

John Finch, Director, presented this report.

- An ABLE United account gives Florida families a better way to save and care for their loved ones with disabilities, without losing any benefits.
- Must be a Florida resident at the time of application and have a qualifying disability with onset prior to age 26. This age will increase to 46 in 2026.
- Program launched 8 years ago, about 175,000 accounts nationwide, and \$1.75 billion saved across the country (\$100 million in Florida).
- Results from recent brand survey showed only 2% knew about ABLE United.

Lighthouse Central Florida, Inc.

Cheryl Rayburn, Vice President,

Lighthouse Works, Shannon Boone, HR Manager, presented these reports.

Due to technical difficulties, some audio is inaudible.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Conklin Davis Center

Ronee David, President/CEO, presented this report.

- 61 staff members.
- Last year provided over 11,000 hours of training in the supported employment contract.
- Several students employed with following: Restaurants, Fox Mattress, Nursing Homes, Lighthouse Works, Universities, Hospitals, and many more.
- Awarded over \$30,000 to fix up greenhouse, deck and some of the walkways by the City of Daytona Beach.
- Voted June 2024 to make the Conklin Davis Center a preferred entity of the Lions Club again.

- Appropriation of \$1,000,000 from the Florida legislature to help the Conklin Davis Center.
 - Appropriation of \$500,000 for the residential program and \$500,000 to begin the restoration of our HVAC air conditioning system.
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July 26, 2024

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Absent

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Sead Bekric
- Paul Martinez

Council Staff Stand-in

- Alexandra Diggs

Committee Report

Jorge Hernandez provided a brief report from the Employment Subcommittee.

- Invited representative from Lowes Hotel for update.
- Lighthouse Works aiming to retain contract with DCF.

Bruce Miles provided a brief report from the Client Satisfaction Survey

- Survey is ready for distribution (Audio cut-out and unable to hear remainder of report).

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

- Improve the communication and dissemination of information with regards to the public forum.
- The committee suggested changing the time and location of the public forum to make it more accessible to the public.
- Require a particular topic for each public forum for (Assistive Technology for Jacksonville to spur discussion).
- Host Public Forum at a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRPs) to increase attendance.
- In previous public forums, attendance of active callers increased but the quality of questions and comments fell short of expectations. The Council expressed their appreciation to those who worked to get documents and notices out.

Paul Edwards provided a brief report from Tallahassee Day Subcommittee & Blind Services Foundation.

- Tallahassee Day
 - Department of Education will not be involved in any activities related to Tallahassee Day but did not object to the council visiting the Florida Capitol
 - DOE will not pay for an extra night of hotel stay and the council must be prepared to pay for an extra night hotel stay.
 - Paul Edwards made a motion that the Council continues involvement and that individual members recognize that they will pay for a one-night hotel stay. Motioned carried.
 - The council discussed other means to provide funding for travel for the Tallahassee Day.
- Blind Services Foundation
 - SET (Senior Equipment Training)
 - Assisted 100 individuals.
 - Donated close to \$160,000.
- The Council approved a motion to request assistance from the Blind Services Foundation to purchase Zoom, which will assist with meeting participation.

Client Assistance Program Report

Arthur Moody provided a brief report.

- Last quarter (April-June) 151 CAP cases, 8 were from clients of DBS.
 - 2 cases of non-computer user.
 - 1 case no written notice.
 - 1 case poor communication.
 - 2 cases denial of post-secondary (Actions justified)
 - 1 case for denial of education.
 - 1 case about training.

Due to technical difficulties, audio was inaudible.

Agenda Items for November 2024

- CAP Report.
- Needs Assessment.
- Gifts & Donations.
- Moore Communication Update.
- Client Satisfaction Report.
 - Status of Open & Closed Cases-Survey on Resident Programs.
- RSA Update.
- Policy Update.
- Jacksonville Transportation Authority
- FSDB Report.
- Sub-Committee Reports.

July 2025 Meeting

Paul Edwards motioned to have July 2025 meeting in Daytona Beach, FL and Orlando, FL as a secondary location. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Dates are July 23rd- 25th 2025.

Unfinished Business

Paul Edwards motioned to have Tallahassee 2025 meeting January 29th-31st. Jorge Hernandez seconded the motion. The motion passed

New Business

The Council would like all PowerPoint presentations sent along with quarterly reports when permissible.

Open Discussion

A brief discussion was held about social media platforms.

Paul Edwards motioned to request DBS to include the quarterly Employer Recognition on its social webpages. Misty Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Denise Valkema moved to adjourn. Misty Porter seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.

Due to technical difficulties, some audio was inaudible.