

**Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind Quarterly Meeting Minutes**  
**Marriott Jacksonville Downtown**  
**245 Water Street Jacksonville, FL 32204**  
**November 6-8, 2024**

**Council Members Present**

- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Paul Edwards
- Patricia Lipovsky

**Council Members attended Virtually**

- Donte Mickens
- Arthur Moody
- Sead Bekric

**Council Members Absent**

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Denise Valkema

**Council Staff**

- Brandis Hall

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

**Adoption of Agenda**

Robert Kelly made a motion to accept the agenda. Paul Edwards seconded the motion. Motion passed.

**Approval of July 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Jorge Hernandez made a motion to accept July 2024, meeting minutes. Patricia Lipovsky seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

## Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report to the Council:

### Staff

- Director Doyle recognized the new Vocational Rehabilitation Director, Kelly Rogers.
- Chief of Staff, Amanda Ball, is transitioning to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.
- Staffing Update
  - Contracts - One contract manager processing contracts.
  - New contract manager hired. Start date is December 6.
  - Deputy Director's new staff - Layne Mikesell (Apprenticeship) & MiKayla Mingle (Program Administrator).
- Contracts
  - Revising contracts to separate DBS VR services from Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).
  - Separate deliverables and revamped work-based learning experiences.
  - Additional language being included to deal with incident reporting.
  - Approval granted for changes to the Pre-ETS contract by RSA.
  - Contracts extended due to Hurricanes Helene & Milton.
- National Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Study Results:
  - High turnovers.
  - Employment Services highest selected choice on survey.
  - Staffing - 13% fully staff and at capacity.
  - Barrier - Recruit staff, lack of referrals, training, low provider rate, inconsistent requirements and procedures.
- Communication Strategies (Moore Communications)
  - Targeting individuals with blind or visual impairment 11.5 billion impressions. 3.1 business consumers 3.5 billion impressions.
  - 6.5 million target consumers reached
  - 62,000 clicks 8-9K consumer side 53000 business outreach
- Storm Damage – All DBS districts are serving clients. However, several offices sustained damage. Tampa was impacted the most. Staff have relocated to a state building. Work on cleanup and restoration is in progress.

- DBS-VR Manual is being incorporated into administrative rule.

### **DBS Employment Report**

Marian Rezkallah, Program Administrator, presented the report for Quarter 1.

Quarter Performance Outcomes:

- 3753 total number of clients served Q1.
- 286 closed cases of which 96 were successful.
- The rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 48%.
- 106 unsuccessful closures after receiving services.
- The average hourly wage is \$15.22
- The highest wage is \$25.96
- The lowest wage is \$11.54.

Ms. Rezkallah informed the Council the overall unsuccessful closure rate was down. Attributing to this, among other things, were increased communication, more meetings with our clients, more face-to-face meetings, VR Training, and policy and procedure reviews.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Client Satisfaction Survey**

Dr. Minna Jia presented.

- Survey Population: July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2024– 508 clients.
- Among 238 respondents, 219 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- 40% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment.
- DBS overall satisfaction: 92%.
- Local service providers overall satisfaction: 90%.

The Council inquired about survey results being reviewed and improvements being made. Director Doyle informed the Council that a team will be reviewing data in the following weeks to discuss and offer solutions to the concerns at hand.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Employer Recognition**

Dan O'Connor, District Administrator, District 3, recognized MV Transportation Inc.

### **District 3 Administrator Report**

Dan O'Connor, District Administrator, presented..

- The district staffs a total of 16 full-time employees. This includes 2 State Office Employees, the regional BEP Consultant and an OPS Reader/Driver. The district currently employs 6 visually impaired and /or blind staff members.
- For SFY 2023-2024, 68 VR successful closures goal was met.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Florida Center for the Blind**

Anisa Pieriboni, President, Chief Executive Officer, presented.

- 5 full-time and 11 part-time employees, including 4 who are visually impaired.
- Serving 185-200 clients with funding from DBS, donations and grants.
- Challenges
  - Lack of funding to support all needs (transportation-elderly)  
Transportation-Tuesday and Thursday (provide in-center training).
  - Contract does not allow funding for traveling.
- Offer by-phone support services to anyone with visual impairment.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Florida School for the Deaf and Blind**

Tracie Snow, President, presented.

- Public School option as well as boarding school option.
- Adhere to all rules and regulations of a traditional school.
- Teachers have dual certification.
- Out of 517 students who attend, 149 students are blind or visually impaired. 55 students are day students and 94 are in the boarding program.
- Parent Infant Program – program goal is to emphasize the development and use of the child's functional vision, as well as helping families receive information and resources as they navigate the new world of having a child with a vision impairment. Support provided from birth until age 6.

- Stay and Play Program – provides opportunities for parents and children from 18 months until age of 3 to network, work with professionals, and adapt to campus life.
- Hosting National Goalball Tournament

### **Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (ASB)**

Lisa Howard, Interim Chief Executive Officer, presented.

- Created a search committee to find a new CEO.
- Extended Howard’s contract until the position is filled.
- Strategic Plan to renew the goals and update the plan to accomplish the goals.
- Meet with Senior Chancellor Kim Richey to discuss issues. Offered to meet with CRPs once a month.
- Advocacy committee working on CP-Children Task Force and The Annual Tallahassee Day.

### **Elder Care of Alachua County**

Beverly Bennett, Program Manager, presented.

- Major programs include the Independence with Low Vision Program and Meals on Wheels Program. Most training and services are provided primarily one on one in the client’s home.

Served in past contract year

- 69,973 meals were provided.
- 33,574 hours of in-home respite care.
- Older Blind Program - 118 clients.
- Independent Living Adult Program – 15 clients.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Florida State College at Jacksonville VERC**

Michael Pugh, Program Manager, presented..

The Vision Education and Rehabilitation Center (VERC) is the result of state and federal grants and is a joint venture with the State of Florida Department of Education Division of Blind Services and Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ).

- With the closing out of the 2023-24 VR/Pre-ETS contract, VERC over-served unique clients as well as hourly deliverables.
  - Transition/Pre-ETS: 60 clients served (111%), 6,461.75 hours (104%)
  - Vocational Rehab: 130 clients served (108%), 5,670.25 hours (158%)
  - Total VR/Pre-ETS: 190 clients served, 12,132 hours

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Client Assistance Program Report**

Arthur Moody provided a brief report.

- Did not have enough service requests from DBS clients last quarter to provide meaningful statistics. (5 service requests).
  - 1<sup>st</sup> request - Denied enrollment at Career Technology and Training Center due to disability related reasons, case no written notice. Investigation and advocacy by CAP led to client's placement at Conklin Davis Center.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> request - Unable to reach client.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> request - Communication and trust issues between the client and the counselor were blocking progress. CAP was able to assist with communication and reestablish enough trust for services to move forward in a productive way.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> request - related to delays in payment for services, resolved by DBS by the time the CAP service request was opened.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> request - by the client for a new counsellor, resolved between DBS and CAP.

### **Florida Rehabilitation Council**

Jose Morales, Council member, presented the report.

- New Council President, Vice Chair, and Director of VR.

Collaboration Opportunities:

- New sound system.
  - Focus on Appointments
  - Awareness Campaigns
-

**November 8, 2024**

**Council Members Present**

- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Paul Edwards

**Council Members attending Virtually**

- Arthur Moody
- Donte Mickens

**Council Members Absent**

- Ciawanda McDonald
- Sead Bekric
- Denise Valkema

**Council Staff**

- Brandis Hall

**Committee Report**

Paul Edwards presented the Tallahassee Day and Blind Service Foundation (BSF) update.

- The date will be revised due to absence of legislature during the planned week. Subject matters to be addressed: funding for seniors, White Cane Law, and allocation of additional funds to DBS.
- BSF allocated most funds to the Senior Equipment Training Program which distributed approximately \$160,000 last year. It is expected to be the same this year.

**Agenda Items for January 2025**

- New Director VR Kelly Rogers/Senior Chancellor Kim Richey
- DBS Budget
- DBS-District 2-Tallahassee Report

- CRP-LBB-Report
- Elections
- DBS-VR Manual
- Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantage
- Committee Reports

### **October 2025 Meeting**

Paul Edwards motioned to have the October 2025 meeting in West Palm Beach, FL. Robert Kelly seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Dates are October 22-24, 2025.

### **Unfinished Business**

The Council held a brief discussion about the resignation of Bruce Miles. Paul Edwards moved that a plaque be purchased for Bruce Miles. Robert Kelly seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **New Business**

The Council held a discussion about RSA. What can the Council do to attend the meeting? Discussion to develop a contingency plan to find another source of funding to send an executive committee member or two.

Patricia Lipovsky moved to adjourn. Robert Kelly seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.

Due to technical difficulties, some portions of the recording were inaudible.

Jacksonville Transportation Authority, Greer Gills, President/CEO, presented a report.