DBVI State Rehabilitation Council Minutes - April 28, 2022

Present: Heather Allen, Sherrie Brunelle, Nicole Clements, Jerry Doody, Martha Frank, Tom Frank, Harriet Hall, Fred Jones, Sarah Kirby, Kaelyn Modrak, Charlie Murphy, Steve Pouliot, Olga Pschorr, John Spinney

Tom Frank made a motion to accept the SRC minutes from February 24th. Sherrie seconds the motion. The motion carried.

Sherrie recommends SRC minutes to be printed in 14-point font with 1.5 spaces. Jerry Doody made a motion to accept. John Spinney seconds the motion. The motion carried.

SRC Updates:

Steve Pouliot: VABVI will develop accessible waterfront project near ECHO museum, hopefully to be completed next year. Signs will be in braille and large print. An audio file of signage and a tactile metal sign of the Adirondack range will be included in the project. The waterfront project will promote awareness, and the city of Burlington has approved the project.

Referrals are consistent to VABVI at present. VABVI presented an Assistive Technology Fair that was attended by 30 people per session. Five sessions covered assistive technology of the iphone, ipad, use of smartspeakers, refreshable braille display, and improving mobility with light.

VABVI Teachers for the Visually Impaired (TVIs) express concern that special education coordinators are not aware of who they are and what they do. The importance of braille needs to be emphasized for new special education coordinators. One of VAB’s orientation and mobility instructors, Shelby Glass developed a Vermont mobility mural that depicts the different ways that individuals who are blind and visually impaired travel. Shelby Glass and VAB created a workshop attended by 50 people throughout the world, including diverse countries i.e., Canada, Sweden. This inspiring mural is located at 237 North Winooski Avenue.

Fred Jones: Musician, Grace Potter also promoted awareness of visual impairment within the news coverage related to the mobility mural.

Martha Frank: Vermont Family Network is looking for a new Executive Director. If you know of anyone who would like that information, please forward this information. Vermont Family Network hosted annual in person conference and speaker Pete Wright from Wrights Law. Upcoming workshops include EPSDT for youth under age 21 to add to your Medicaid toolkit on May 4th from 11 to noon. Additionally, a workshop on Self-Advocacy and Transition planning will be held on May 26th from 10 – 11, Tara Howe and Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie presenting. The youth summit on May 19th will be virtual. Information on this training can be found on the Core Team pages. Martha describes that presenters, Jackie Kelleher and her two sons, will be dynamic and inspiring. They have met with the youth advisory council to tell their stories.

John Spinney: Leads the Agency of Education task force for alternatives to guardianship. John is drafting language from Green Mountain Self Advocates to bring specific messaging to all LEAs and specific forms for educators to support students who need alternatives to guardianship to help make decisions in finances so they can make their own decisions. Special Education Advisory Panel has a good relationship with the State Education Agency to move things forward. Adjustments to the graduate plan is one example of the important outcomes and work resulting from this relationship.

Tom Frank: The ABLE library is working on the summer reading program for youth. ABLE supports other print related disabilities in addition to blindness and visual impairment. The library is for anyone who needs support, not solely individuals who are blind and/or visually impaired. The National Library provides large print books and refreshable braille displays, and anyone who reads braille can get one of these for free.

John Spinney: Agency of Education Update. Last year, the Agency of Education focused on analysis of transition assessments and annual goals. Individuals on an IEP who are age 16 and up must have a post-secondary transition plan, and eight elements need to be included in the plan. AOE just monitored about 15 districts; 400 IEPs were reviewed for their compliance. John can now pull up a district and see the eight issues and provide direct training on that component.

Sherrie Brunelle: The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is working on expanding its outreach to community partners. One such activity is training about CAP for Department of Corrections staff.  CAP is also planning to participate in orientation for HireAbility VT staff. Part of that will be creation of a video about CAP to assist in onboarding for new staff. CAP is also working to ensure the current VT Legal Aid website [www.vtlawhelp.org](http://www.vtlawhelp.org) is up to date and accessible.

Charlie Murphy, Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL): The Human Rights Commission hosted an interview that Sarah Launderville did with Judy Heumann. Judy Heumann was featured in the Netflix film, Crip Camp. Directed by James Lebrecht, a former camper, and Nicole Newnham, this inspiring film explores a group of people with disabilities who banded together in the 1970s down the road from Woodstock.

The Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) has been actively involved in the campaign, “Our Time is Now,” along with the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, HireAbility Vermont, Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council. These organizations are working together to inform employers about a large group of in-state residents who could be valuable employees. “The campaign…aims to help Vermonters with disabilities join the workforce. Vermont's workforce took a hit during the Covid-19 pandemic, losing 22,000 workers since 2019, according to Kyle Thweatt, a spokesperson for the Vermont Department of Labor. Leaders of the campaign say the Vermonters they work with are ready and able to help the state bounce back (NFB Newsline, Vermont Digger, Accessed 20 June 2022).”

VCIL highlighted May 10th, the 3rd of a series of Disability Awareness Day events. This event focused on Disability and the Intersection of Climate Change with Ming Canaday as presenter. VCIL is recruiting for Peer Advocate Counselors in Rutland and Bennington and one individual for the Home Access Program.

Fred Jones: DBVI submitted the State plan and incorporated all feedback from SRC. Updates the group on new area of Support Service Providers to assist public health workers and better support individuals who are deaf and blind. These individuals receive training and are skilled at helping a blind person to navigate as a human guide. Training related to deafness includes tactile sign (in someone’s hand) and haptic sign (on someone’s back or arm) that offers information about the setting. Out to bid next week, $121,000 for the first two years from the from the Agency for Community Living.

Jerry Doody, Vermont Council for the Blind has 76 members, most members are seniors, and they are hoping to get together for annual conference in June. Jerry will suggest each area get together in smaller groups. Jerry highlights VCB Coffee Hour and Assistive Technology group. Recently, VCB members attended a play in Weston and traveled to the Flynn theater. There is a virtual bookclub on 2nd Wednesdays at 5:00pm that is audio described.

Fred Jones: Market Decisions Research out of Portland, Maine has completed DBVI’s Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Data collection included consumer interviews and three focus groups of the SRC, TVI group and DBVI staff. The next report cycle will be two years from now.

Six priority areas of work were identified by the consumer satisfaction survey: the need to improve communication, outreach, mentorship, support for adjustment to vision loss, expanding remote work opportunities, and case closure definitions to better support consumers. While we want to hear about what needs to be improved, it is important to note:

90% of the consumers surveyed said they were satisfied with DBVI services;

95% of the consumers said they are better off from services;

97% were treated with dignity and respect; and

91% said DBVI helped them to become more independent.

Fred Jones: with regard to communication, staff training has emphasized empathy, seeing from the client’s point of view, drawing from the work of Stephen Covey. A smaller DBVI group has been formed to work on apprenticeship and how to grow virtual opportunities. Please contact Olga Pschorr at olga.pschorr@vermont.gov if you would like a copy of the full Market Decisions report.

Tom Frank: During the pandemic when everyone was working remotely there was a need to support when there is documentation, temporarily providing a reader for someone.

Fred Jones: offers information on AIRA service. AIRA allows the agent to look through their camera and give information to someone about what it on the phone or computer screen. This service is similar to Be My Eyes, except that they are bonded, and it is a paid service, $1.00 per minute.

Jerry Doody: My comment about outreach is for seniors. I would like to see an independent living piece, with increased outreach to seniors this summer.

Tom Frank: Hireability’s rebranding effort is on all of the TV stations as extended news, human interest, not the big news of the day. Public radio to get the information out.

Tom Frank: There is a service barrier access to MH services. One person always puts in your signature if you need help with food and resources. 211 is very important. In reference to remote jobs, I know there are call centers that have been using individuals who work remotely from home.

Kaelyn Modrak: Identifies the need for more mentors. It would be wonderful to combine the efforts of older populations with mentoring of younger age groups.

Harriet Hall: Thank you to the State Rehabilitation Council for their participation. Tom Frank motions to adjourn. Harriet seconds the motion. Meeting adjourns at 12:01.