

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
Hilton Miami Airport Blue Lagoon
5101 Blue Lagoon Drive, Miami, FL 33126
October 27, 2022

Council Members Present

- Arthur Moody
- Bruce Miles
- Ciwanda McDonald
- Denise Valkema
- Donte Mickens
- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Jose Morales (FRC)
- Misty Porter
- Nancy Bateh
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Paul Edwards
- Paul Martinez
- Robert Doyle
- Robert Kelly
- Roxann Mayros
- Sead Bekric

Council Members Absent

- Sophia Eccleston

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall
- Alexandra Diggs

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 was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

Director Doyle read the obituary of Council Member Bessie (Earline) Outman.

Appointments:

- The Governor appointed and/or reappointed a total of fourteen individuals October 14, 2022, to the FRCB.
- Not all historical categories are filled. The focus has been on filling statutorily required seats.
- Brandis Hall, FRCB Staff Assistant, is available to provide individuals with a Microsoft Word formatted copy if they have difficulty with accessibility in applying for council vacancies. She will assist any applicant in their application process if needed.

Storm Update:

- All DBS offices were back operational within a week of closing from the storm, with little to no damages.
- Clients were able to return to the DBS Residential Center the following weekend.
- The Commissioner's Office and Chief of Staff were intent on making sure DBS had everything needed and was in place to serve clients and staff that were affected by the storm.
- Some Lighthouses received major impact.

Legislation:

- State Board of Education has approved DBS request to include in the legislative budget request to increase salaries for staff. The process is a lengthy one and still must be approved by the legislature and governor.
- The agency is working on a number of reclassifications within the department with help from the Department of Management Services.
- DBS is only able to spend federal dollars in specific categories, authority is needed in order to allocate those funds into different categories.

- General revenue dollars are needed as well to work on some of those salaries and positions that are not federally funded or may be partially funded.
- DBS is seeking a tax exemption for individuals who may purchase their system technology on their own.
 - Regarding purchase of assistive technology and tax exemptions, Chairman Hernandez shared that the National Federation of the Blind is also working on the same matter and are looking for co-sponsors.

Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:

- Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration requires that the Division conducts a comprehensive needs assessment every three years.
- The assessment will help DBS determine how to focus attention where there may be unmet needs.
- A final report is expected to be shared with the Council in 2023.
- The assessment is being conducted by San Diego State University.
 - Council member Edwards asked will the Council be able to add at least one topic to the assessment, as they have done so in the past.
 - Director Doyle welcomed any additional topics for inclusion.

Administrative Fair Hearing:

- An administrative fair hearing occurs when an individual is dissatisfied with the service of the agency, and they have a right to request a hearing. There are certain procedures and requirements that lead to this hearing.
- DBS reviews, discuss, and find ways to best serve the client and resolve any conflicts before they escalate to a hearing.
- DBS had three requests for an administrative fair hearing in the past year.
- A redacted version of the hearings will be provided to the Council.
 - Regarding satisfactory reports, Bruce Miles explained that the Council has not received a report from the Rehabilitation Center.
 - Director Doyle confirmed that the surveys are still taking place, and a report will be included with all other standard report sent to Council prior to the Quarterly Meetings.

The meeting experienced technical difficulties during the Director's Report.

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc.

Virginia Jackco President/CEO presented the report.

- Miami Lighthouse vision rehabilitation, educational and eye wellness programs encompass all ages from early intervention for blind babies to low vision services for seniors affected by age-related eye disease.
- Miami Lighthouse has been continuously accredited since 1978.
 - Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
 - Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment
 - Department of Children and Families Gold Seal Quality Program
- Miami Lighthouse is a 180,000 square foot facility that includes edible gardens, play area, picnic area with pavilions, and a school.
- The Academy is a full school in collaboration with Miami-Dade Schools, serving grades Kindergarten through 2nd grade.
- According to the National Evaluated Charity Navigator, Miami Lighthouse, among all of the nonprofits in the United States, ranked higher than the top 1% and all the parameters on all of the new criteria, Miami Lighthouse scored 100%.
- Program participants (including Heiken & Miami Lighthouse Academy) served 20,206 individuals in Fiscal Year 2021
- All programs provided are funded by DBS in addition to other various grants.
- Miami Lighthouse has launched a significant effort with a collaboration with Nicholas Children's Hospital, the Bascom Palmer Eye Institute, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and Nova School of Optometry to assure that children that have a visual impairment, that may also have a brain-based injury disability are getting the proper assessment.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Pamela Ortiz, District Administrator, District 12, recognized Chartwells higher education dining services within Florida International University for their

commitment to ensuring people who are blind and visually impaired can work in a collaborative, safe, and respectful environment.

District Administrator Report: District 12

Pamela Ortiz, District Administrator, presented the report.

District 12 is all about having a team approach and caring about other people. Staff members bring to the team diversity, experience, and have 10, 20, even 50 years with the Division of Blind Services.

- The district employs 2 totally blind staff members and 4 with a visual impairment.
- District 12 for the past 8 years has consistently exceeded its successful closure goals
- For State Fiscal Year 2021-2022 the district once again exceeded its closure goals from 100 to 178, closing 78 additional cases and achieving 178% of the goal.
- For State Fiscal Year 2022-2023 the district's assigned goal is 100 successful VR closures and to date there are 13 successfully rehabilitated closures with 48 clients in employed status and another 17 clients who are job ready.
- Strategies for Meeting Employment Goals:
 - DA and Assistant DA meet one on one with staff members and hold staff meetings to discuss data on resource fairs, job fairs, and identify employment, apprenticeships, and work experience opportunities.
 - Collaborate with community partners such as Miami Lighthouse, Career Source, Beacon Council, colleges, and agencies for the common purpose of placing clients in jobs and career pathways.
 - Staff assist with removing barriers for clients by addressing employer concerns regarding hiring clients and identifying practical solutions and accommodations.
 - Conduct sensitivity training to employers.
- District 12 also attends quarterly Living with Low Vision Seminars hosted by Miami Dade's Public Library System alongside individuals and families affected by vision loss and other community partners such University of

Miami, Alliance for the Aging, the Miami Lighthouse, and mental health providers.

Donte Mickens inquired about any challenges District 12 might be facing.

- DA Ortiz informed the Council that the next level would be opening up more apprenticeship opportunities for our clients.

Douglas Ingram inquired about the relationships and partnerships District 12 has with the VA in the area.

- DA Ortiz informed the Council that a bridge has been built with the Veteran Hospital and while the relationship can be stronger, District 12 is open to all applications and ready to assistance where support might be needed.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

DBS Employment Report

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented this report for quarter 1.

Common Performance Measures:

These measures represent clients who maintained employment in quarter 2 and quarter 4 after exiting the program.

- Clients successfully employed - 546
- 16.47% remained employed at the second quarter
- 23% remained employed at the fourth quarter

Quarter 1 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served for Q1 3449
- 340 closed cases of which 121 were successful
- 122 successfully closed cases last year
- 119 unsuccessful closures after receiving services
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 51%
- Average hourly wage is \$15.30
- Highest wage is \$33.65
- The lowest wage is \$10.00

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (66 cases)

- Refused services or no further services (46 cases)
- Other reasons (24 cases)
- Does not require VR services (17 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (16 cases)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Miami Dade College

Elizabeth Potenza, Director of ACCESS, Gabriel Lopez Kafati, ACCESS Resource Advisor, and Jose Dominquez, MEED Internship and Employment Coordinator, presented this report.

- A Comprehensive Center for Exceptional Student Services (ACCESS)
- Housed on eight (8) campuses throughout Miami Dade County
- Intentional advisement
- Academic accommodations and Campus support

Accommodations for visually Impaired Students

- Assistive technology (AT) solutions
 - Fusion 2022: JAWS & Zoom Text combined
 - Desktop Magnifiers: CCTV's & handheld magnifiers
 - Smart Magnifiers: Optical Character Recognition (OCR) capability
- Faculty conference
- Equipment to check out:
 - Digital recorders
 - Large print: Calculators & keyboards
 - Talking calculators & Electronic dictionaries
 - Victor Reader Stream
- Note-taking assistance
- Information & books in alternative format
- Tutoring

Alternative Format Solutions

- Access Text Network – Partnerships with publishers (e.g., Pearson, Cengage)
- PDF files & Audiobooks
- OCR solutions: Kurzweil & Smart Reader

- Braille embosser & Picture in a Flash (PIAF)

Personalized Services

- Faculty conference: Advocacy & Course modifications
- Note-taking assistance: Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) classes
- Tutoring: General Education classes
- Referrals: Division of Blind Services (DBS) & Lighthouse

Career Building

- Transfer assistance
- MEED Program (Model for Enhanced Employment Development)
 - Aims to support students with disabilities who are actively seeking work experience through internship and employment opportunities.
- Resume-Writing & Interviewing Workshops
- Job fairs & Community partnerships

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)

Dr. Minna Jia presented this report. Survey Population: July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022 – 1,104 clients

- Successful Closure – 755 Clients (155 Post Closure)
- Unsuccessful Closure – 349 Clients
- Response rate: 21%, completions: 233
- Non-Working phone numbers 17% (186 out of 1,104), no answer or answering machine all the time 41% (448 out of 1,104).
- Among 233 respondents, 214 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers, while 19 clients received DBS services only.
- Impact of COVID-19 could be seen now clearly by comparing the previous three years data.
- Clients sought employment-based services largely decreased since 2020 but improved in 2021.
- Local service provider responsiveness largely decreased while the accessibility improved
- Job Skills Services satisfaction level largely increased for both DBS and local services providers.
- More clients came to DBS for Employment reasons (47% to 60%)
- Current job characteristic improved

- Awareness of services after case closure increased (best since 2014)
- 94% felt welcomed during the first contact with DBS
- Career counseling received 87% of satisfaction level, decreased from 93% in the previous year
- DBS provided skills necessary to conduct job search: 78% (70%, 2020)
- DBS provided services prepare for employment: 71% (70%, 2020)
- 28% left because they obtained employment for 90 days (30%, 2020)
- 13% expressed confusion over their case closure status (27%, 2020)
- 82% Keeping with career goal (75%, 2020)
- 76% Potential career advancement (71%, 2020)
- 75% Current salary is appropriate (72%, 2020)
- Most helpful services
 - Training 32%
 - Equipment and technology support 23%
- Program improvements
 - Accessibility/Communication 24%
 - No improvements needed 20%

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Sunshine Law

Nicole Saunders, Deputy General Counsel, presented.

- Open Meetings and Public Records
 - Protect the public from “closed door” decision making and provides a right of access to meetings of boards and commissions.
 - Codified in 286 Florida statutes, the Sunshine Law applies to all meetings of “any or commission of any state agency of authority.”
- Three Key Sunshine Law Requirements
 - minutes must be taken
 - open to the public
 - reasonable notice provided
- Understand your Duties
 - Never be a conduit between members of a public board or commission.
 - Written reports must not be circulated to convey a board member’s position to other board members.

- Staff must not convey an opinion of one board member to another board member.
- Communications between just two board members triggers the Sunshine Law.
 - Discussion about agency business between two or more board members (including telephone calls or email exchanges) are subject to the Sunshine Law.
- Florida Public Record
 - Florida’s “Public Record Law” creates a right of access to records made or received in connection with official business of a public body. Chapter 119, F.S.
 - The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted the Public Records Law to encompass all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are used to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge.
- Confidential or Exempt Documents
 - “Confidential” means that the document or information must not be released to anyone unless that person has specific legal right of access.
 - “Exempt” means that the record is not required to be disclosed in response to a public records request.

Agenda Items for February 9th – 10th 2023

- Broward Public Transportation Update
- Needs Assessment Update
- Report from Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) Liaison
- Gift and Donations Update
- Rehab Center Update
- Library Update

Approval of July 2022 Meeting Minutes

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept July 2022, meeting minutes. Roxann Mayros abstained from the motion. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

October 2023 Meeting

Patricia Lipovsky made a motion to have October 2023 meeting in Tampa, FL. Paul Martinez second. The motion was passed.
The dates were set for October 25th – 27th, 2023.

Old Business

Bruce Miles suggested future minutes share more of the Councils dialogue about general business.

Douglas Ingram suggested to have a backup recorder for all FRCB meetings.

New Business

Chairman, Jorge Hernandez, will be collaborating with the Chairman from the FRC more in the near future. Jorge mentioned a “roll call” vote method that will allow for more clarification when motions are made.

The Council briefly heard from FRC Councilman Jose who is looking forward to the collaboration.

Open Discussion

Regarding to Administrative Hearings, Donté Mickens asked, What does representation typically look like for the administrative hearing?

Director Doyle informed the Council, that it's good to have some representation support from the client systems program. However, some clients have taken the opportunity to represent themselves. Depending on the issue at hand, the representative may be someone who is more intimately aware, such as, Bureau Chief, Counselor, or District Administer.

Doug Ingram made a motion to adjourn, Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion passed.