

**Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)**  
**Quarterly Meeting Minutes**  
**The Terrace Hotel, Tapestry Collection by Hilton**  
**329 East Main Street Lakeland, FL 33801**  
**May 4 - 5, 2023**

**Council Members Present**

- Arthur Moody
- Bruce Miles
- Denise Valkema
- Doug Ingram
- Jorge Hernandez
- Misty Porter
- Paul Edwards
- Paul Martinez
- Robert Doyle
- Roxann Mayros

**Council Members Virtual Participation**

- Ciwanda McDonald
- Nancy Bateh
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Sead Bekric
- Sophia Eccleston

**Council Members Absent**

- Donte Mickens
- Robert Kelly

**Council Staff**

- Brandis Hall
- Alexandra Diggs
- La'Toya Mitchell

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

## **Adoption of Agenda**

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept the meeting's agenda. Denise Valkema second the motion. Motion passed.

## **Approval of February 2023 Meeting Minutes**

Douglas Ingram and Roxann Mayros requested minor revisions to the minutes.

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept February 9th – 10th 2023, meeting minutes with corrections. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

## **Director's Report**

Director Doyle presented his report.

### **DBS Staff Update:**

- Mauva McKenzie retiring from DBS after 33 years of service.
- Nicole Sanders has been hired as the new Bureau Chief of the Braille and Talking Book Library in Daytona. An introduction will be presented at the next FRCB meeting.
- Elesha Brown has joined the DBS contracts team in a supervisor role.

### **Legislative Session:**

The budget bill has been printed and is undergoing approval.

- DBS requested additional funds to implement increases primarily to field-based positions.
- Anticipation for reclassification is expected to follow.
- DBS requested funds to make permanent indirect rates for CRPs costs.
- DBS requested funds for the library shelving project.
- The legislature also added increases for retirees.
- The division is currently working on legislative budget requests for 2024.

### **Moore Communications: Marketing**

Kate Beckwith, Associate Director, joined Director Doyle to provide a high-level overview of the DBS campaign.

- The campaign is entitled Career Success and is expected to be launched in two weeks.

- The goal is to connect clients and customers with a DBS team member to receive the support customized to meet their specific employment needs.
- Through advertising efforts, there will be campaign assets available through print and digital channels, including a direct mail piece, native online ads, rideshare and doctors' offices videos, and online streaming radio as well.
- Ms. Beckwith shared the direct mail piece, a radio script, and the landing page with the Council.
  - There was dialogue between the Council and Ms. Beckwith about accessibility for voiceovers and the use of Braille for marketing.
- Director Doyle continued his report:
- Rehabilitation Center name change is underway. The center is being rebranded as the Career, Technology, and Training Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Business Enterprise Program: March was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest reporting monthly sales since 1996. Approval has been granted to place cameras in rest areas for vendors security. The Micro Market at DMS in Tallahassee is celebrating 12 months. More Micro Markets are expected to open soon.

#### Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

- RSA will be on-site July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
- There are two main components of monitoring.
  - Fiscal Arena
    - Controls and expenditure of dollars
  - Program Outcomes and Performances
- DBS and CRPs met with Senior Chancellor, Henry Mack, of DOE to discuss relationships, contacts, rate study, and potential.
- Dr. Mack requested the rate study to be completed by the end of May.
  - Councilman Paul Edwards inquired about adding additional data that was collected by the CRPs into the rate study.
    - Director Doyle informed the Council that additional data will be included.
  - Chairman Jorge Hernandez inquired about the FRCB adding input to the next year's legislative budget requests.
    - Director Doyle informed the Council that input is welcomed.

## **DBS Employment Report**

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

### Quarter 2 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served for Q3 3721.
- 436 closed cases of which 212 were successful.
- 158 successfully closed cases last year.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 66%
- The average hourly wage is \$16.53.
- The highest wage is \$29.12.
- The lowest wage is \$10.00.

### The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (64 cases)
  - Refused services or no further services (40 cases)
  - Other reasons (31 cases)
  - Failure to cooperate (20 cases)
  - Does not require VR services (18 cases)
- Councilman Edwards inquired about a past issue the Council looked into, expedited reopening's for closed cases that needed to be reopened in order to retain employment.
- Chief Giles informed the Council that the expedited system is going well and there have been no delays.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

## **Employer Recognition**

Nancy Brown, District Administrator, District 7, recognized LegoLand, in Winter Haven as an Outstanding Employer in Polk County. Legoland has continuously made efforts in providing a positive work environment that supports diversity and inclusion.

## **District Administrator Report: District 7**

Nancy Brown, District Administrator, presented the report.

- District 7 is comprised of a main office in Tampa and a satellite office in Lakeland and serves 7 counties.
- District 7 staffs a total of 18 full time employees and 2 OPS part-time staff, and currently has 4 vacancies. 5 staff members who are visually impaired and/or blind.
- District 7 has been assigned a goal of 100 successfully rehabilitated VR closures for FY 2022-2023. To date, they have successfully employed and closed 76 clients and an additional 27 cases in employed status.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

### **Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind & Low Vision**

Sheryl Brown, Executive Director, presented the report.

- Tampa Lighthouse employees 54 employees. 24 staff are part-time for transition. 30 staff are full-time and 2 staff are visually impaired.
- The Lighthouse is no longer affiliated with NIB. In 2019, they rebranded as Lighthouse for the Blind & low Vision to be more inclusive of Polk and Hardee Counties and to reach out to more individuals with low vision.
- In 2021, they added early intervention to Hillsborough County as it was no longer offered by the school district.
- Achievements – The first accredited agency in Florida in 1976. Receiving 5 years then and each time since. Tampa Lighthouse recently completed the accreditation process and is waiting for approval.
- Councilwoman Denise Valkema inquired about the number of clients served at the Lighthouse verses the clients in the field.
  - Sheryl Brown informed the Council that the majority of clients are seen from the Lighthouse.
- Paul Edwards inquired about hybrid programs and online classes.
  - Ms. Brown informed the Council that the Lighthouse has returned to all in-person classes as of August of 2022.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Paul Edward updated the Council on the Vocational Evaluation Tool.

- The tool was created to better assist individuals who are job ready.
- It measures elements that simply aren't available in other vocational education tools. (examples below)
  - What is your readiness for orientational ability?
  - What do you know about assistive technology?
  - How is your adjustment to blindness?
  - What are you doing in terms of community involvement?
- The tool is essential and is believed to be the best Vocational Evaluation Tool in existence.
- It is now undergoing the copyrights process.

### **Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)**

Dr. Minna Jia presented this report. (cases closed between 2022-2023 Qtr 1-2)

- Survey Population: July 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022 – 434 clients
- Successful Closure – 276 Clients (85 Post Closure)
- Unsuccessful Closure –158 Clients
- Response rate: 28%, completions: 123
- Non-Working phone numbers 3, no answer 61, answering machine all the time 105.
- Among 123 respondents, 109 DBS clients received services from both DBS and local providers.
- Among 123 respondents 70% (86) have successfully closed cases while 30% (37) have unsuccessful cases.
- 96% feel welcome when they first contact DBS, this is the highest among the past 6 years.
- More than half of the clients came to DBS for employment reasons.
- - 37% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment.
- 22% sought services to maintain their current employment.
- DBS overall satisfaction: 93%.
- Local service providers overall satisfaction: 83%.
- Most helpful services
  - Training 33% (29%, 2021)
  - Equipment and technology support 30% (25%, 2021)
- Program improvements
  - Accessibility/Communication 20% (24%, 2021)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

## **Lighthouse of Pinellas, Inc (LHP)**

Meri Taylor, Director of Programs, presented this report.

- LHP is a small nonprofit with a full-time staff of 21 and a part-time staff of 6.
- LHP is actively engaged in multiple grant applications revolving around general operational support and specific program needs.
- Lighthouse of Pinellas is expected to meet or exceed all contract requirements in the coming year.
- All training has transitioned back to in-person. However, LHP continues to offer virtual coping and self-advocacy classes, individual counseling, and support groups services in a virtual and in-person format.
- Since October 2022, the Transition business, Blind Sighted Creations, has participated in 8 community markets, selling their handmade braille bracelets and 3D-printed braille products, in addition to sharing information about and the importance of LHP's services to the community.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

## **Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired & Blind (LVIB)**

Stefanie Pontlitz, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

- The mission of the Lighthouse for the Visually Impaired and Blind is to educate, empower, and employ people in Pasco, Hernando and Citrus Counties who are visually impaired and blind.
- LVIB is a small nonprofit with a full-time staff of 11 and a part-time staff of 17. More than 50% of the staff experience varying degrees of visual impairment or blindness. 8 clients were brought on board as staff after successful completion of services at LVIB.
- 2021-2022 1,311 lives were touched through LVIB services.
- LVIB is ahead of target to meet and exceed numbers for the contract year in AP, OB, and VR.
- LVIB has created a focus on grants, especially around mental health.
- In October LVIB started an Adjustment to Blindness class that addresses emotional and mental adjustment not just the physical which is addressed in our Independent Living class. The two classes together form a holistic approach to serving our OB clients.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

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

Amy Grissom, Chief Executive Officer, presented this report.

- ASB is made up of 16 CRP's.
- ASB works as a consortium and association where individuals work together on day-to-day operations, management of client situations, communicating and collaborating together, for best practices and services to help the clients in the best way.
- ASB will be holding a Transition Conference. A conference committee has been assembled and planning is underway.
- 48 students are currently registered for the Transition Conference.
- The ASB website has been redone to be 100% accessible.
- ASB has started highlights on social media. Highlighting the clients, services, staff, and agencies themselves on their successes.

Douglas Ingram requested a written report from ASB for future meetings.

### **State Workforce Investment Board Report**

Sophia Eccleston, Director of Originations, presented this report.

- CareerSource Florida (CSF) is the governor's statewide principal workforce policy board. CSF who works with local workforce development boards across the state that operate 100 careers centers as well as the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.
- Together, these entities make up the CareerSource Florida network, which works every day to connect job seekers and employers.
- Resource for all Floridians, including those with disabilities, seeking new or better careers.
- Local career centers are staffed by disability service specialists who are dedicated to individuals with disability ,access to high quality workforce services and getting individuals prepared for competitive integrated employment.
- In fiscal year 2021, the CSF Network served nearly 4500 individuals with disabilities.



- CareerSource Florida's top priority has been, the implementation of the Florida Reimagining Education and Career Help act , also known as the REACH Act, that was signed into law by Governor DeSantis in 2021.
- Paul Edwards inquired about the number of individuals with disabilities served.
  - Sophia Eccleston will confirm the number of placements from the individuals served.
- Doug Ingram inquired about the positions that were placed.
  - Sophia Eccleston will confirm the status of the placed positions at a later date.

### **Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) Report**

Jose Morales, FRC Councilman, presented a brief update.

- FRC next meeting May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023,
- FRC is in the process of updating their By-Laws.
- FRC is working on recommendations and language on their State Plan.

### **May 5, 2023**

The Council held a discussion about in-person vs virtual meetings, emphasizing the importance of meeting in person.

The Council was reminded of the By-Laws:

ARTICLE V SECTION 1.

E. Council members are requested to notify Council staff of an anticipated absence from a scheduled quarterly meeting at least four (4) weeks in advance of the meeting. Council members are expected to attend all quarterly meetings and at least two of the four meetings must be attended in person.

F. The Chair has the authority to authorize virtual/telephonic attendance at a quarterly meeting of the Council.

Brandis was instructed to note in the Minutes who attends virtually.

Doug Ingram motioned to have Florida Agencies Serving the Blind present a report at each FRCB quarterly meeting. Roxann Mayros seconded the motion. The motion passed.

### **Agenda Items for July 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> 2023**

- Florida Agencies Serving the Blind Presentation
- Sunshine Law Presentation
- Needs Assessment Interim Report
- FRCB Committee Reports
- Moore Communications Update
- Rate Study
- Library Report

### **February 2024 Meeting**

Paul Edwards made a motion to have the May 2024 meeting in Fort Myers, FL. Denise Valkema second. The motion was passed.

The dates were set for May 1st – 3rd, 2024.  
The secondary location will be in Ocala if needed.

### **Old Business**

No old business discussed.

### **New Business**

Doug Ingram motioned for the Council to purchase a US flag and a State of Florida flag to be present at each meeting. Paul Martinez seconded the motion. The motion carried.

### **Open Discussion**

Paul Edwards motioned to not have a Public Forum at the July 2023 meeting. Bruce Miles seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Paul Edwards motioned that a CRP Subcommittee is assembled and plans a meeting with the CRPs for October 2023 FRCB meeting. Bruce Miles seconded the motion. The motion carried.

CRP Subcommittee: Paul Edwards, Jorge Hernandez, Roxann Mayros, and Robert Kelly.

A Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Subcommittee was assembled.

CSS Subcommittee: Bruce Miles, Paul Edwards, Denise Valkema, Nancy Bateh, and Aruthur Moody.

### **CSAVR Report**

Director Doyle provided a brief review.

- Key priorities for CSAVR
  - Recruitment and retention
  - Streamline processes and procedures
  - Expanding outreach and communication
  - Effective utilization of resources
  
- The RSA, through the technical assistance centers, posted a series of trainings designed around helping state agencies increase the participation rate individuals with disabilities in the workforce through maximum optimization of resources.

Doug Ingram motioned to adjourn. Denise Valkema seconded. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.