

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes
Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore
2225 N Lois Ave. Tampa, FL
October 26 - 27, 2023

Council Members Present

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

Council Members Virtual Participation

- Ciwanda McDonald

Council Members Absent

- Patricia Lipovsky
- Sophia Eccleston

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

Doug Ingram made a motion to accept the meeting's agenda. Paul Martinez second the motion. Motion passed.

Approval of July 2023 Meeting Minutes

Paul Edwards made a motion to accept July 27th – 28th 2023, meeting minutes with amendments. Denise Valkema seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

Outreach Event

- White Cane Awareness event hosted by DBS in the Turlington Building on October 13th.
- Collaborating with Moore Communications on additional outreach for White Cane Awareness.
- Communications, strategies, and different marketing material are in the works to be utilized online to recognize White Cane Awareness throughout the year.

Staff

- Christina Panczak-Smith and Jean Fiore, both Assistant District Administrator for DBS, along with Counselor Nancy Batch have left the employ of DBS.
- Audry Turner is the new Assistant District Administrator at the Daytona office.
- Whitney Paine is the new Acting Assistant District Administrator at the Jacksonville office.
- The Production Supervisor position is expected to be filled; this will split the duties of Maureen Dorosinski who will be able to focus on her role with Library Services.
- Many team members in the field as well as State Office Bureau Chiefs will see an increase in pay starting October.

2024 Legislative Budget

- Request for an additional \$500,000 for blind services.
- Request for \$1.3 million to provide funds to Community Rehabilitation Programs for adjustment to blindness counselors.
- Request for about \$8 million for additional authority for users utilizing federal dollars.
- Request for contract rates to be increased.

Emily Read, Managing Director of Moore Communications addressed the Council.

- Communications Agency of Record for the Department of Education working with the Division of Career Technical and Adult Education, The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and The Division of Blind Services.
- The goal of the outreach campaign is to connect people who are blind or visual impaired, who are looking to either train or retain their position in the workforce to connect them with the division of blind services.
- One page summary of success and report was developed.
- There were over 20 million impressions, 463 media hits, and over 1400 unique website visitors.
- The campaign produced 16 leads - people who provided their information to DBS seeking support and connection.
- Moore developed more than 55 custom assets, such as advertising, artwork, flyers, and emails.
- Specific to White Cane Awareness for the month
 - Raising awareness about the importance of recognizing white canes, understanding the Law, and what we can do to help support individuals with blindness and visual impairments.
 - Conducted interviews with stakeholders, including individuals with visual impairment, white cane users, among them law enforcement partner organizations and service providers.
 - Executive summary that gives an overview of what was learned in these conversations and will be more than happy to provide that as a follow-up.
 - Developed a flyer that was released to more than 1000 schools across the state and reached over 780,000 parents and guardians.
 - Developed and shared custom social media assets to reach partner organizations and libraries.

- Developed an article for online media distribution across the state with an anticipated audience of 14 million. This piece is currently on the market, so we will look forward to sharing the great success of it once the numbers are confirmed.
- Developed an infographic that is meant to be signature campaign asset. Statistics, facts about white cane awareness, the law, and graphic imagery to help make this a nice tool that our partners will want to use.
- Develop and deploy an audio news release for Blindness Awareness Month. This is currently market airing on 156 radio outlets across the state including Florida News network and Florida Public Radio, which are statewide news outlets.

Brandis will share the infographic with the Council.

Vice Chairman Mickens inquired about having opportunity to incorporate some of the employers recognized by the Council.

Ms. Read along with DBS did not see an issue and could see a number of uses for collaboration with these businesses.

Councilman Sead Bekric inquired about promoting the Florida Business Enterprise Program.

Ms. Read informed the Council that outreach for the Florida Business Enterprise Program is part of the current year's plan.

Needs Assessment

- This is a function that the Council is also involved in; Amongst other things the comprehensive statewide needs assessment looks at the overall agency performance and looks at the needs of individuals who have most significant disabilities. Needs for supported employment and at individuals from different ethnic groups, those populations that are unserved or underserved and whether there is a need to develop or improve or CRP programs in the state of Florida.
- This information rolls into the state plan to determine how DBS will conduct services in the next 4-year period.

- Charles Tripplett informed the Council that vital information that's being collected for the state plan is undergo.

Library

- Anticipating E Readers by the end of the year

Paul Edwards requested that the Library do fairly careful outreach to be sure that all potential individuals who would be interested in the accruing E Readers know they're available.

DBS Employment Report

Marian Rezkallah, Program Administrator, presented this report for quarter 1.

Quarter 1 Performance Outcomes:

- Total number of clients served for Q1 3682.
- 286 closed cases of which 81 were successful.
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 41%
- The average hourly wage is \$16.81.
- The highest wage is \$25.00.
- The lowest wage is \$12.25.

The top 3 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (67 cases)
- Refused services or no further services (44 cases)
- Moved Out of State (22 cases)

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

- The Council inquired about the average hourly median wage and the number of clients served for quarter 1.
 - Brandis will forward an updated employment report to the Council once received.

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)

Dr. Minna Jia presented this report. (cases closed between July 2022- June 2023)

- Survey Population: July 1, 2022, to June 3, 2023 – 1,017 clients
- Successful Closure – 703 Clients (116 Post Closure)
- 32% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment.

- 33% sought services to maintain their current employment.
 - DBS overall satisfaction: 92%.
 - Local service providers overall satisfaction: 90%.
 - Most helpful services
 - Training 33%
 - Equipment and technology support 26%
 - Program improvements
 - Accessibility/Communication 17%
- The Council had a brief discussion about clients being made aware of their cases being closed.
- The Council held a brief discussion about CRP's sharing their surveys in order to incorporate sensible questions into an overall survey which presumably will create more comparable data that would allow further conclusions about the blind community in the state of Florida.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Nancy Brown, District Administrator, District 7, recognized Major Family Chiropractic Center.

Conklin Davis Center for the Visually Impaired, Inc.

Ronee David, President/CEO, presented the report.

Programs Successes

- Case 1: Client was in training for nine months before being employed at Embry-riddle University.
- The client has an apartment and is living independently.
- The client now has a supported living coach and a supported employment coach.
- Case 2: Client obtained employment at Fox Mattress, an apartment, and the client is also living independently.
- Case 3: Client obtained employment at Heritage Waterside Hotel, and currently assisting client to find affordable housing.

- The Council inquired about funding for the Conklin Center.
 - Ronee David informed the Council that a fundraiser was held last spring, where over \$100,000 was raised.
 - The Center is working on securing grants all the time and recently secured a grant for almost \$300,000.
 - The funds do not move from one program to another.
- The Council inquired about Conklin Center's annual report.
 - Brandis will forward to Council once received.

Blind Services Foundation Report

Paul Edwards, President, presented this report.

- Motorcycle Tags
 - \$150,000
- Special Projects
 - Vocational Evaluation Tool
 - Finalizing the copyright process and determining how it would be made available.
 - C. Triplett is the administrator of the tool.
 - Senior Employment & Training (SET)
 - Request made by blind seniors because they did not have access to training and equipment.
 - Rules
 - 1. Must go through the DBS Sub-Committee
 - CRP or DBS Office
 - Mireya Hernandez heads sub-committee
 - Examines the forms.
 - Make an initial decision.
 - Submit to the board.
 - 2. Give the Equipment based on when training is made available
 - Individual with an open case
 - Individuals without an open case, the DSO will request that the case be open.
 - Small request-case will not be required to open DBS case.

- Renewals for JAWS, Fusion license-do not care if a case is open or closed (DBS)
 - \$20,000 spent so far.
- Create more apprenticeship program.
 - One program at the Career, Technology, and Training Center
 - Part-Time or Full-time to explore apprenticeships.
 - Trina Travis is taking the primary lead of the program.
- White Cane Law
 - P. Edwards drafted a proposal.
 - Develop and Implement tactics that the law is looked at appropriately.
 - State of Florida to be the model state

Career, Technology, and Training Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CTTC)

Jay Boyle, Bureau Chief, presented this report.

- The CTTC currently has 26 students with 18 in the residential hall.
- 6 remote (IL/Technology) 2 (BEP)
- 12 more people awaiting placement.
- Programs based in technology.
 - CompTIA Program, Computer Technology Industrial Association
 - Currently 3 participants
 - Web Accessibility Program
 - Currently 4 participants
 - Call Center in conjunction with Orlando Lighthouse
 - Anticipating to begin early next year.
 - 10-day program
 - 10 participants at a time.
- The CTTC may need to investigate additional dormitory space for the future.
 - Currently can house 30 students.
 - Special Taskforce created for potential new dorm.
- Exit Survey/Interview
 - Upgrading and updating
 - Survey results are mostly positive.

- The Council inquired about programs are available remotely from the CTTC.
 - Jay Boyle informed the Council that all technology training programs are available remotely including some non-tech programs.

Tallahassee Day Discussion

Paul Edwards and Roxann Mayros led the discussion.

- The purpose for Tallahassee Day is to visit the legislator with a set of notions of what's important for those who are blind and to inform the legislators that blind people have significant needs in this state. What the needs are and how they are met.
- Identify issues that require the attention of the legislators.
- Sub-committee with representatives from CRP & FASB & FRCB meeting on regular basis.
 - Shows partnership.

Planning

- One page letter
- Map of State of Florida with data developed by Big Data
 - Educate legislators on what's occurring in their district.
- Need to make appointments.
 - Organized-one group per legislator
- Set up visitation with demonstrations
 - Vision Simulator Cards, Canes etc.
- Upon arrival in Tallahassee a meet and greet on Tuesday evening 2/6/24 to discuss comprehensive message, marching orders, disperse materials, and last-minute details.
- Wednesday 2/7/24 – Walk to Capitol and organize stations. This will ensure that all aren't in the same place at the same time.
 - Gather and celebrate the work at the Capitol for a job well done on Wednesday evening.

October 27, 2023

Florida Instructional Material Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC-VI)

Elizabeth Anderson, Project Manager, presented this report.

- Statewide resource center for K-12 students who are visually impaired and enrolled in a public school, private school, or students being homeschooled.

- The primary role is to offer support to districts in the procurement or production and distribution of accessible instructional materials (braille, large print).
- Mailing list has over 2,500 subscribers, sharing survey opportunities, trainings and conferences, and resources that FIMC-VI staff have learned about.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

The Council inquired about any specific challenges.

- Ms. Anderson informed the Council that the biggest challenge for FIMC-VI is identifying more students. Students in Florida are being under identified compared to other states. As well as the textbook adopting cycle.

Florida Rehabilitation Council Report

Jose Morlas, FRC Councilman, presented a brief report.

- FRC is currently amending recommendations to VR. As well as their Annual Report.
- Looking forward to hearing from FRCB and supporting each other in the advocacy arena for legislative sessions.

Elections

Paul Edwards nominated Jorge Hernandez for Chair. No further nominations for Chair were given. Paul Edwards motioned Jorge Hernandez to remain Chair. Denise Valkema seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Paul Edwards nominated Donte Mickens for Vice Chair. No further nominations for Vice Chair were given. Paul Edwards motioned to declare Donte Mickens elected. Bruce Miles seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Paul Edwards nominated Doug Ingram for Second Vice Chair. No further nominations for Vice Chair were given. Paul Edwards motioned to declare Doug Ingram elected. Denise Valkema seconded. There were no objections. Nomination passed.

Agenda Items for February 8th – 9th 2024

- State Plan Discussion
- Needs Assessment

- RSA Report
- Committee Reports– Tallahassee Day and Employment Subcommittee
- Chancellor Kim Richey
- Star Metro Transportation/ transportation disadvantage

October 2024 Meeting

Paul Edwards motioned to have October 2024 meeting in Key West, FL. Secondary location Jacksonville. Robert Kelly seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The dates were set for October 23rd – 25th, 2024.

Committee Report

Paul Edwards provided a brief report for the Tallahassee Day subcommittee.

- Met twice and plans to meet at least two more times.
- Currently have representation from FASB, Florida Council of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind and welcome over a representative from Blind Veterans Association.

Bruce Miles provided a brief report from the Satisfaction Survey Subcommittee.

- One meeting completed with another scheduled.
- DBS to provide a list of questions to be added to survey.
- Committee will review questions prior to meeting.

Brandis will follow up with Amy Grissom about FASB sharing exit interview survey questions.

Unfinished Business

Big data report for employment is currently being prepared for Florida.

The Council had a brief discussion about the Big Data report being used for the needs assessment.

New Business

No new business discussed.

Open Discussion

No open discussion

Doug Ingram motioned to adjourn. Denise Valkema seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned.