

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)
Quarterly Meeting Minutes

February 25, 2021

Chair Paul Edwards called the meeting to order with the introductions and Pledge of Allegiance led by Kim Carr.

Council Members Present

- Paul Edwards
- Robert Doyle
- Kim Carr
- Misty Porter

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

Adoption of Agenda

Misty Porter made a **motion** to accept the agenda. Kim Carr seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Misty Porter made a **motion** to accept the October 2020 meeting minutes. Kim Carr seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

- Critical hires for DBS staff are beginning to be approved, focusing on direct service positions and federally funded positions.

Since Covid-19 there has been a percentage decrease in the number of applications for service. Comparing to February 2019 – 2020 and 2020 - 2021:

- 19% decrease in all applications
- 3% decrease in number of plans created
- 33% decrease in hours of services provided. (all programs)
- 3042 less clients have been served between February 2019-2020 compared to February 2020-2021
- Employment programs have 4% increase in the number of services provided.

VR Program:

- 7% decrease in applications.
- 2% decrease in individuals who have applied and been determined eligible for services.
- 11% increase in number of plans created for employment related services
- 2% increase in case closures. Actual number in change 36.
- 19% decrease in number of authorized purchase orders. Actual number in change 2929 less. \$492,234 less spent.

Older Blind Program:

- 30% decrease in application. Actual number in change 572.
- 30% decrease in individuals who have applied and been determined eligible for services. Actual number in change 537.
- 19 decrease in plans created.
- 24% decrease in case closures.
- 10% decrease in actual service provided.
- 25% decrease in number of hours of service provided.
- 16% increase of purchase orders.

Blind Babies Program:

- 24% decrease in applications. Actual number in change 67.
- 28% decrease in individuals who have applied and been determined eligible for services. Actual number in change 78.
- 24% decrease in actual service provided. Actual number in change 4400.
- 28% increase in purchase order.

Children's Program:

- 31% decrease in applications. Actual number in change 69 and 64 less children determined eligible.
- 36 decrease in actual service provided.
- 49% decrease in purchase order.

Independent Living program:

- 24% decrease in applications. Actual number in change 55.
- 43% decrease in number of hours of service provided. Actual number in change 4460.
- 17 more purchase orders and \$13,000 more dollars spent through P.O. for those programs.

Residential Facilities:

- An open dialog is taking place amongst leadership and the Conklin Davis Center to determine plans for moving forward with a goal to create a contract for new supported employment residential services in Daytona, FL.
- Day students are now back attending the Rehab Center. It is a goal within the next 30 days to have some residential students return as well, plans are underway.
- Due to Covid 19, conversations with leadership and The Department of Health is underway to figure out the best way to have our residential students return to a safe environment.

Rate / Sustainability Study

- San Diego State University will help us in this area.
- The rate study will envision all programs and consist of data, cost, contracts, and various other analyzations. Evaluations, comparisons, recommendations and strategies will be given to implement change.

Staff Updates:

- Leigh Ann Bellamy has been promoted as new District Administrator for District 9.
- Cesar Vigo has been promoted as new District Administrator for District 10.
- Edwin James has joined the DBS team and is now the new District Administrator for District 6.

Net financial consequences for CRP's.

- For contracts with a contract period of July 1, 2020 – June 30th 2021, there has been \$220,942 (net) in financial consequences. Total contract amount for these programs is approximately \$7.46 million annualized. This is data through January 2021, while January data may not be concluded.
- For contracts with a contract period of October 1, 2020 – September 30th 2021, there has been \$206,809.99 (net) in financial consequences. Total contract amount for these programs is approximately \$9.1 million of contracts for employment and transition related services. This is data through January 2021, while January data may not be concluded.

VR Report

Bridget Giles presented an overview of the VR Report.

- The total number of clients served for the second quarter was 3502 compared to last year when 3502 were served
- Total number of closed cases 358 of which 137 were successful
- Last year successful closed cases was 359
- The number of unsuccessful closures after receiving services is 110
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 55%
- Average hourly wage is \$16.34
- Highest wage is \$202.00
- The lowest wage is \$8.56

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Refused services or no further services (51 cases)
- Unable to locate (44 cases)
- Does not require VR services (27 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (28 cases)
- Other Reasons (20 cases)

Improvements for quarter 2:

- Applications being signed and dated
- Certificate of eligibility
- Documentations in aware that supports expenditures that were spent
- Timely closure letters

There is now a policy in place that will allow clients coming in with a job to have priority to some extent, so that they will not lose their jobs.

DA Report: District 1

Deborah Carty, District Administrator, presented the report.

- District 1 consist of 10 counties and scratches about 8,795 square miles
- 60% of the served population is in the rural area
- 40% urbanized areas within four of the 10 counties
- Out of the six rural counties in District 1, an average of 18% of the population are living below the federal poverty line. The official national poverty rate for 2019 was 10.5%.
- District 1 is also home to one of the nation’s largest military base footprints from Tyndall AFB to NAS Pensacola and all the fields and stations in between (Eglin, Duke and Hurlburt Field) bringing aviation and defense related industries to the area as well as new Bureau of Business Enterprise opportunities.

Staff Members:

- District 1 currently has 9 full time employees, 2 OPS reader/drivers and 2 vacant positions. District staff and positions are as follows:
- 1 District Administrator
- 1 Assistant District Administrator
- 3 VR Counselors – (2 in Pensacola and 1 in Panama City)
- 2 Rehab Technicians – (1 in Pensacola and 1 in Panama City)
- 1 Employment Placement Specialist
- 1 IL/CP Specialist – (Panama City)
- 1 Senior Word Processor, Pensacola - vacant
- 1 Staff Assistant, Pensacola - vacant

The district currently employs one blind staff member and one with a visual impairment.

Performance Goals:

District 1 has consistently exceeded its annual goal for successful rehabilitation rehabilitations for the last six years and this year will be no exception.

For SFY 2020-2021 the district’s assigned goal is 43 successful VR closures and to date there are 21 successfully rehabilitated closures which is 49% of the goal.

There are currently 6 clients in employment status and another 13 who are job ready.

Current open cases (YTD):

- Blind Babies: 25
- Children's Program: 49
- Independent Living Program: 97
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program: 134
- College cases: 9
- Pre-ETS (Transition): 33
- PE (Potentially Eligible): 5

Expenditures (July-October)

- Services to clients: \$7,151.98
- Eligibility and assessments: \$7,616
- Maintenance: \$6,981.69
- Physical and mental restoration: \$77,185.88
- Technology: \$17,369.94
- Non-contracted training: \$31,434.40
- Transportation: \$50.00

Strategies for Meeting Employment Goals:

- The DA and Assistant DA hold weekly team meetings using Microsoft Teams.
- The Assistant DA also meets one-on-one with VR counselors throughout the month to review cases, identify activities due and offer guidance and assistance when needed.
- The EPS conducts 12 or more employer contacts per month (6 new and 6 follow-ups).
- VR Counselors conduct four or more employer outreach activities per month and have started contacting successfully closed clients on a quarterly basis to help ensure continued successful employment.
- EPS and VR Counselors take advantage of Career Fairs, both in-person and virtual.

Employer Recognition

Deborah Carty, District Administrator – District 1 Pensacola/Panama City, recognized The School District of Escambia County. Mr. Keith Leonard, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources, accepted the award on their behalf.

The Able Trust – Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation. Allison Chase, Interim President, presented the report. The mission of The Able Trust is to be a key leader in providing opportunities for successful employment for Floridians with disabilities.

Operating under the dba of The Able Trust, the organization has helped to put thousands of individuals with disabilities to work, and has supported employment-related efforts in all counties of Florida.

The Able Trust does its work in three primary strategic areas: a comprehensive grant award effort that helps community organizations with programs that provide employment training, coaching, and placement; an extensive and successful youth program, which addresses the need to encourage high school youth with disabilities to plan for their education and employment future; and programs directed at providing workforce experiences for people with disabilities – internships, mentoring, job shadowing, part and full time jobs.

Florida Transportation Plan

The Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) is the single overarching plan guiding Florida’s transportation future. Updated every five years, the FTP is a collaborative effort of state, regional, and local transportation partners in the public and private sectors.

Seven Goals of the Plan

- Safety and Security
 - *Today*: Focus on 4Es (engineering, education, enforcement, emergency services) of traffic safety to reduce fatalities and injuries
 - *Future*: Use emerging technologies and address land use and socioeconomic factors to improve safety and security for all modes

- Infrastructure
 - *Today*: Maintain existing facilities in a state of good repair; focus on physical infrastructure
 - *Future*: Evaluate and adapt infrastructure to become more resilient to risks and take advantage of innovations; expand definition of infrastructure to include technology
- Mobility
 - *Today*: Focus on increasing system efficiency and reducing delay
 - *Future*: Prioritize the movement of people and freight; accelerate new technologies and options to increase reliability and service
- **Accessibility & Equity**
 - ***Today*: Expand transportation choices**
 - ***Future*: Enhance access for all Floridians to jobs, education, health care, and other services, especially for those who need it most**
- Economy
 - *Today*: Emphasize global competitiveness and trade
 - *Future*: Support regional and local job creation and investment as well as global commerce; support a more resilient and diverse economy
- Communities
 - *Today*: Support quality places
 - *Future*: Reflect community visions and values
- Environment
 - *Today*: Minimize impacts of transportation on the environment
 - *Future*: Proactively enhance and restore natural systems for future generations

Opportunities to Further Engage & Comment

- **Transplex**: Transportation Planning Exchange (every Friday in April beginning April 9th) Free. Register at www.fdot.gov/planning/transplex
- Fall 2021 Implementation Conference – Session dedicated to Equity & Access

The Able Trust – Updates

- New Board, November, 2020
- Transition of CEO/President Position

- **Programs to Know About:**
 - ABLE Network
 - Young Professionals Network
 - High School High Tech
 - DEAM
 - Catchafire

A primary focus is the Sunset Review. This review has been extended to October 1st 2023. Although The Able Trust is stable financially, another primary focus is to actively engage with donors around the state raise money.

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS) Quarter 1 and 2 Report SFY 2020-2021

Dr. Minna Jia presented an overview of the SFY QTR 1&2 Report 2020-2021.

- The Florida State University Survey Foundry (FSUSF), Institute of Science and Public Affairs conducted a telephone survey of former DBS clients on a monthly basis
- Employment-bound clients with cases “closed” between July 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020 comprises the population surveyed for this second quarter report.
- DBS provided the names, addresses, phone numbers and demographic information for 376 former clients
- Successful Closure – 204 Clients (39 Post Closure)
- Unsuccessful Closure –172 Clients
- 69% of the 81 responding clients indicated that they “Strongly Agree or Agreed” that DBS services provided skills necessary to conduct a job search independently and 68% agreed that DBS services prepared them for employment.
- Case closure awareness for 2020-2021 QTR 2 is 85%.
- 89% or more clients had high levels of satisfaction with DBS
- 95% of responding clients felt welcome when they first contacted DBS. This satisfaction level was 92% in 2019
- The response rate to the survey for is 34.3% (129 completed interviews). All 129 of the responding clients surveyed received services from DBS according to the record provided by DBS, while 109 clients received services from both DBS and local providers
- 9% of clients left DBS due to Covid 19

CIL

Susan Foster, Assistive Technology Program Specialist, presented.

CILs are consumer-driven, non-profit organizations whose mission is to support community living and independence for people with disabilities based on the belief that all people can live with dignity, make their own choices and participate fully in society.

CILs provide tools, resources and supports for integrating people with disabilities fully into their communities to promote equal opportunities, self-determination and respect.

Core Services:

- Individual and systems efficacy
- Information and referral
- Independent living skills training
- Peer counseling mentoring
- Transition services

Other Programs:

- Assistive Technology (F.A.S.T.)
- Equipment loans (no charge)
- Social and recreational activities
- Support groups
- Amplified telephone program

BrightStar Care

Meghan Ruff, MSN, RN, presented a report.

BrightStar Care of Bay County, believes that caring is more than just a job– it's a way of life. Caregivers mean so much more to the people, families, and organizations they serve. BrightStar Care nurses, therapists, CNAs, and caregivers deliver professional and compassionate care in the comfort and familiarity of

home. BrightStar Care provides a range of home care services to meet unique needs. From companionship, bathing, and hygiene assistance to in-home infusions and medication management, the professional care staff is available 24/7 to help.

Independence for the Blind of West Florida

Raven Holloway, Executive Director presented a report.

Mission

To empower people who are blind or visually impaired in Northwest Florida to achieve maximum independence.

Vision

To be the standard of excellence in rehabilitation services for people with blindness and visual impairments.

Purpose

Independence for the Blind of West Florida, Inc. was founded exclusively for the purpose of promoting charitable, educational and recreational activities designed to help the blind, and severely visually impaired persons, to achieve their chosen levels of independence through programs which include rehabilitation training and support services.

Independence for the Blind has been serving the visually impaired community since 1980 and is the only nonprofit devoted to training, education, and empowering individuals living with blindness and visual impairments in Northwest Florida. Today, IB West service areas include the 10 western counties of the Florida panhandle, spanning from the port of Pensacola to the Apalachicola River, covering over 7,500 square miles.

Independence for the Blind is a small nonprofit with a full time staff of 5 and a part time staff of 4. IB West currently have two full time positions open and are hoping to fill in the near future. Once filled, we will go back to having 7 full time employees.

Program staff offers the following certifications:

- 2 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT)
- 1 Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)
- 2 Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI)

The positions open are for the following:

- Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist
- Assistive Technology Instructor (preferably CATIS certified, or willing to obtain)

Programs Offered:

- Children's Program: current clients – 9, contract amount – 5
- Transitional Program: current clients – 16, contract amount – 23
- Vocational Rehabilitation: current clients – 9, contract amount – 40
- Independent Living AP: current clients – 12, contract amount – 9
- Independent Living OBP: current clients – 61, contract amount – 83

In the most recent close contract, IB West have served the following unique clients in their service areas:

- Children's Program – 10 clients
- Transitional Program – 23 clients
- Vocational Rehabilitation – 34 clients
- Independent Living – Adult Program – 8 clients
- Independent Living – Older Blind Program – 76 clients

IB West will be applying for two major grants - Sunday's Child in March and Impact 100 in June. Grant funds will be used to update the computer lab equipment, iPads, etc. and new vehicles used for client transportation.

The staff is working hard, thinking "outside the box" to develop different ways to provide services and enrichment opportunities for clients. The remainder of 2021 should be filled with excitement, new experiences, new opportunities and plenty of rewards for all involved!

October 2021 Meeting Place

Misty Porter **motioned** St. Petersburg for place of meeting. Kim Carr **seconded** the motion.

Global Employment Connection

Katrina Simpkins, Director of Employment & Support Service presented.

Mission

“Helping people throughout life's journey”.

Employment and Supportive Services

Vocational Rehabilitation

- On-the-Job Training
- Community Employment Services
- Pre-Placement Training
- Employment and Support Services, a business line of Global Connections to Employment (GCE), helps people with disabilities prepare for competitive work through evaluation, career planning and employment and support services.

Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation and Career Planning: This process helps people achieve greater self and work knowledge through participation in activities designed to evaluate skills, interests, and abilities. We learn what skills training and/or continuing education may be suitable for them, and what supports and services might be needed to ensure employment success. Some examples of the assessments include:

- Academic achievement
- Intellectual functioning
- Ability to follow instructions
- Aptitude
- Job interests
- Motor skills

The Targeted Employment Services team at Global Connections to Employment (GCE), helps people with disabilities prepare for competitive work through the following programs:

- Project Search
- Employment Enhancement Project
- Targeted Employment Navigation Services: These services help applicants with disabilities navigate the GCE employment process and includes:
 - Recruiting applicants with disabilities
 - Performing evaluations to determine if applicants are AbilityOne qualified
 - Collaborating with hiring managers to identify and recommend appropriate workplace accommodations and supports for GCE employees
 - Providing solution-oriented services intended to promote job retention and assisting with job placement for GCE employees when employment outside of GCE is a goal.

GCE currently has 13 employees who have a primary diagnosis of legal blindness

Agenda Items

- Award segment for staff
- Rate Study update

Kim Carr made a motion to have February 2022 meeting in Pensacola/Panama City. Misty Porter second.

Robert Doyle mentioned that DBS is looking to pursue a federal grant, the idea is to pursue expansion apprenticeship and/or career pathways.

The council held a brief discussion about Appointments.

Kim Carr motioned that Paul Edwards generates another letter to submit to the Governor. Misty Porter seconded the motion.

Misty Porter made a motion to adjourn. Kim Carr seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.