

Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (FRCB)

Quarterly Meeting Minutes

February 10, 2022

*Chair Jorge Hernandez called the meeting to order with the introductions and Pledge of Allegiance.

Council Members Present

- Nancy Bateh (Ex-officio)
- Howard Bell
- Robert Doyle (Ex-officio)
- Jorge Hernandez
- Douglas Ingram
- Robert Kelly
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Donte Mickens
- Bruce Miles
- Bessie Outman

Council Members Absent

- Jennifer Coburn

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

Adoption of Agenda

Robert Kelly made a motion to accept the agenda. Bruce Miles **seconded** the **motion**. The motion was **passed**.

Approval of October 28th, 2021, Meeting Minutes

Robert Kelly made a motion to accept October 28th, 2021, meeting minutes. Bruce Miles seconded the motion. The motion was passed.

Director's Report

Director Doyle presented his report.

Staff Updates:

- Staffing has remained one of the biggest challenges of the last 18 months. DBS has an estimated vacancy rate of approximately 25% employment vacancy. The Division is strategizing ways to better recruit employees.
- Jim Woolyhand is retiring from the Braille and talking Book Library.

Budget:

- DBS' proposed budget is pretty consistent with what was approved last year.
- The Governor and legislator have each proposed pay increases for state employees.
- Across the Department, there are no proposals to cut any positions.

Partnerships:

- Lighthouse of Central Florida has a contract with the Department of Children's and Family and are hiring call center employees. 60 employees have been hired so far and it is anticipated that 60 more will be hired.
- Miami Lighthouse and Miami Dade College are working with DBS to hire employees for airlines and call centers.
- A call center program is being explored for the Daytona campus.
- It is a goal to have every DBS client dual enrolled with Career Source to better meet the client's needs.

Other Updates:

- Trina Travis and Kimberly Bonnette are diligently working to put things in place for a Web Accessibility Apprenticeship Program.
- The Business Enterprise Program is reviewing federal developments related to electric vehicle charging stations and how they may be of benefit to the program.
- The DBS team is out in the field doing contract monitoring.
- DBS, amongst other agencies, named to have monitoring from RSA this year.

VR Report

Bridget Giles, Bureau Chief, presented this report.

- The total number of clients served for the second quarter was 3519 compared to last year when 3502 were served
- 409 closed cases of which 182 were successful
- 137 successfully closed cases last year
- 120 unsuccessful closures after receiving services this year
- 110 unsuccessful closures after receiving services last year
- Rehabilitation rate for closed cases was 60%
- Average hourly wage is \$15.64
- Highest wage is \$48.39
- The lowest wage is \$8.56

The top 5 reasons for unsuccessful closures are:

- Unable to locate (66 cases)
- Refused services or no further services (54 cases)
- Other reasons (26 cases)
- Failure to cooperate (24 cases)
- Does not require VR services (20 cases)

Improvements for Quarter 1:

- Signed and stamped application for services
- Maintenance forms completed, and justifications entered
- Initial interview completion and signed
- Timely obtained vocational evaluations
- Releases of information forms signed and dated
- Quarterly updates on client contact and college student contact

DA Report: District

Deborah Carty, District Administrator, presented the report.

District 1 encompasses the first ten counties in the Florida panhandle (Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, and Gulf), with an area totaling 8,795 square miles and a population of just under 1.1 million.

District 1 has two offices; a main District office located in Pensacola, Escambia County, and a satellite office in Panama City, Bay County.

Performance Goals:

District 1 has consistently exceeded its annual goal for successful rehabilitations for the last seven years and is expected to do this same this year as well.

For SFY 2021-2022 the district's assigned goal is 43 successful VR closures and to date there are 14 successfully rehabilitated closures with 12 clients in employed status and another 27 who are either job ready or maintaining employment.

Current open cases (YTD):

- Blind Babies: 29
- Children's Program: 59
- Independent Living Program: 112
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program: 158
- College cases: 12
- Pre-Employment Transition and Transition Services: 23
- Potentially Eligible Youth: 4

VR Expenditures by Service Category (July 21 - December 21)

- Services to clients: \$8,625.41
- Eligibility and assessments: \$9,000
- Maintenance: \$9,584.54
- Physical and mental restoration: \$126,245.27
- Technology: \$49,215.97
- Non-contracted training: \$41,402.02
- Transportation: \$4,962.11

Strategies for Meeting Employment Goals:

- The DA and Assistant DA hold weekly team meetings to share data and now that we have administrative support staff in place, we have started a new team competition complete with bulletin boards showing visual progress toward goals.
- The Assistant DA meets one-on-one with VR counselors at a set time each week as well as when needed.

- VR Counselors increased the use of Vocational Evaluations as much as possible to ensure client informed choice for an attainable career path.
- The Districts' EPS maintains a steady rapport with our local CareerSource offices and has had great success making new employer contacts through our Chamber of Commerce memberships.
- Rehabilitation Technicians are actively working to increase vendors in AWARE and support staff are ensuring vendor information is up to date.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

Employer Recognition

Deborah Carty, District Administrator – District 1 Pensacola/Panama City, recognized Bay County School District. Ms. Lori Hast, Principal of Margaret K. Lewis School, accepted the award on their behalf.

Independence for the Blind of West Florida (IB West)

Raven Holloway, Executive Director presented a report.

Mission

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

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.

IB West serves individuals ages 5 and older who are blind or visually impaired and offer the following programs and to date are tracking at the following amounts:

- Children's Program: current clients – 7, contract amount – 5
- Transitional Program: current clients – 18, contract amount – 20
- Vocational Rehabilitation: current clients – 25, contract amount – 25
- Independent Living AP: current clients – 6, contract amount – 9

- Independent Living OBP: current clients – 63, contract amount – 83

In the most recent closed contract, IB West has served the following unique clients in our service areas:

- Children’s Program – 10 clients served, 5 per contract
- Transitional Program – 23 clients served, 23 per contract
- Vocational Rehabilitation – 18 clients served, 40 per contract
- Independent Living – Adult Program – 19 clients served, 9 per contract
- Independent Living – Older Blind Program – 87 clients served, 84 per contract

IB West was featured as the nonprofit of the month for Gallery Night in Downtown Pensacola, Florida.

IB West hosted a successful White Cane Day celebration. The mayor of Pensacola attended and spoke about the organization, and well over 300 guests attended.

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

The Able Trust – Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation

Allison Chase, 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.

Current goals to close the employment gap between individuals with disabilities and the general population:

- Research Initiative
- Nationwide Practices
- Surveys

Able Trust will be launching “Inclusive Florida: Powered by The Able Trust” to help strengthen Florida's workforce and move Florida into a leadership position involving disability employment.

The Able Trust will be traveling the State doing listening sessions with businesses, persons with disabilities, and VR agencies such as DBS to find out the successes and challenges happening throughout the community.

Outreach Communication Strategies

Stephanie Brown, Bureau Chief, presented this report

External Affairs handles a variety of external-focused functions and relations for the Division of Blind Services. Their primary role is to engage and communicate with the public and stakeholders’ groups.

- Communications
- Marketing Media and Public Relations
- Advocacy
- Outreach
- Government Relations

Current and Upcoming Projects:

- Targeted Outreach
 - Eye Medical Professionals
 - Older Blind Organizations
 - Hispanic, Asian, and Rural Communities
 - Faith-Based Organizations
 - Providing Awareness Resources to the District as they Get Back in the Community.
- Library Growth
 - Library Task Force
 - Radio and Social Media Campaign
 - Updated Brochures and Literature
 - See Different Team Initiative Targeting Library Services
- Business Enterprise Program recruitment
 - Assist BEP with recruitment efforts to increase the number of student and young adults enrolling in the program
 - Updated Recruitment Brochures and Marketing Literature

- Rehab Center Bed Utilization
 - Assist the Rehab Center in increasing its bed utilization rate
 - Strategic Target: 90% Annually
 - Counselor Toolkit for internal marketing to districts and counselors to increase referrals
 - Coordinate with the Rehab Center for District Inservice Trainings
 - Updated Brochures and Literature

Web and Social Media

Connect with DBS at DBS.FLDOE.ORG

- External Affairs information is located on the following pages:
 - News
 - Events
 - Blog
- Social Media callout box is also located on the Home page that provides updates from the DBS Facebook page.
 - FB: Florida Blind Services
 - Twitter: FLBlindServices

Email: Communications@dbs.fldoe.org

BSF Vocational Evaluation Tool Update

Paul Edwards presented this update

The Council encouraged DBS to create a vocational tool that will show where a person stands when it comes to job readiness. The tool was developed over several years with the DBS Foundation, collaborating with leading expert, Dr. Karen Wolffe.

Major Developments:

- The Vocational Education Tool was presented to The Association for the Education Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired at the end of November 2021
- Paul Edwards, with the assistance of Director Doyle, presented the Vocational Education Tool at the NCSAB 2021 Fall Virtual Conference
- Appointed DBS staff are being trained by Dr. Wolffe to operate the Tool.

- Dr. Wolffe is finalizing the manual, creating additional training for staff, conducting interviews with clients who used the tool, and developing and implementing a number of final touches that will happen with the Tool.

The goal is that the Vocational Education Tool will be used a lot more by counselors that help clients with their vocational evaluations. The tool is expected to be the primary tool in Florida.

The Council held a brief discussion about the WIAO Plan led by Bridget Giles. Bridget Giles will forward the link to the Council where they can view the final plan once public comments are received.

Rate / Sustainability Study Update

Chip Kenney presented this update.

The methodology for this study required interviewing of DBS staff, CRP executive staff, and fiscal staff. It also required reviewing data from the AWARE system from DBS and other data sets, reviewing contracts, monitoring protocols, and holding discussions with DBS senior administration and budget team over a course of time.

Findings:

With the focus on blind agencies, in terms of contracting around the country it was found that Florida's Division of Blind Services is unique, having a statewide system of community rehabilitation programs that are specifically focused on blind and visually impaired individuals. No other state has as much depth.

The overall finding was that the current system of contracting is to everyone's advantage because it provides an even administration and funding is consistent year to year.

The cost per case is where data fell short due to the lack of participation from CRP's. With only having cost data from seven CRP's, no conclusion was able to be given on the actual cost for CRPs neither was a determination made on what the rate should be. The recommendation was made that DBS and FASB join and negotiate a cost per case using actual data that will be sound methodology.

The Council held a brief discussion on this matter. A detailed report will be sent to the Council.

Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS)

Dr. Minna Jia presented an overview of the SFY QTR 1 Report 2021-2022

- 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
- Survey Population: July 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021 – 219 clients
- Successful Closure – 117 Clients (33 Post Closure)
- Unsuccessful Closure – 102 Clients
- Less than half of the clients came to DBS for employment reasons.
- 35% of the respondents said they came to DBS to obtain employment (33%, 2020).
- 5% sought services to maintain their current employment (14%, 2020)
- 0% sought to advance their employments (4%, 2020).
- Other reasons: 60%
- High levels of satisfaction with DBS training: at least 89% satisfaction level (93%, 2020)
- Low vision training received 89% of satisfaction level, decreased from 97% in the previous year.
- Counselor Responsiveness improved 90% (85% 2020)
- About half of the respondents recommend DBS to others because its services and programs are helpful. Helpful 44% (51%, 2020)
- 13% left because they obtained employment for 90 days (30%, 2020).
- 26% expressed confusion over their case closure status (27%, 2020).
- When clients were asked whether they are aware of their cases had been closed, 5% said no (8%, 2020). Cases reopened increased from 5% to 11%.

Responsiveness decreased in the following area:

- DBS counselors informed them of rights and responsibilities as a client of the VR program: 97% to 92%
- DBS Counselors and local services providers made certain that they received services identified in their plan: 92% to 84%

A full detailed report has been provided to the Council.

The council held a brief discussion about the By-Laws.

Bruce Miles referenced page seven paragraphs E, F, and G of the By-Laws.

Paul Edwards suggested due to post Covid circumstances that the By-Laws committee meets to discuss changes. The council supported his suggestion.

Agenda Items for May 5th - 6th 2022

- Conklin Davis Center Update
- Library Update
- Campus Tours
- Friends of the Library
- WIOA Update
- By-Laws Discussion

Bruce Miles made a motion to have February 2023 meeting in Fort Lauderdale. Doug Ingram second. The motion was passed.

The dates were set for February 8th – 10th 2023.

The council held a brief discussion about Appointments and Reappointments.

Howard Bell suggested drafting a combined letter from the consumer groups to support getting new appointments on the FRCB. The council supported the suggestion. Doug Ingram agreed to work with Paul Edwards and Howard Bell on a draft letter.

*Chairman Hernandez recessed the council meeting and transitioned to the Public Forum.

February 11, 2022

*Chair Jorge Hernandez called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance and introductions.

Council Members Present

- Howard Bell
- Robert Doyle (Ex-officio)
- Jorge Hernandez
- Douglas Ingram
- Robert Kelly
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Donte Mickens
- Bruce Miles

Council Members Absent

- Nancy Bateh
- Jennifer Coburn
- Bessie Outman

Council Staff

- Brandis Hall

DBS Staff

- Bridget Giles, Alexandra Diggs, Lisamarie Vanmeter, Ana Saint-Fort

The Council affirmed 2023 meeting location and dates.

The Council affirmed May 2022 agenda items.

By-Laws Subcommittee

- Howard Bell
- Paul Edwards (Advisory)
- Jorge Hernandez
- Donte Mickens
- Bruce Miles

Patricia Lipovsky recommended that the By-Laws Subcommittee discuss including the Vice Chairs into the decision-making process along with the Chairperson.

The Council held a discussion about the Customer Satisfaction Survey questions. The Council agreed to review the survey questions and if any, have issues clarified at the next business meeting.

The Planning Committee:

- Jennifer Coburn
- Paul Edwards (Committee Advisor)
- Doug Ingram
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Bruce Miles (Committee Chair)
- Earline Bessie Outman

The Evaluation Committee:

- Nancy Bateh
- Howard Bell
- Robert Kelly
- Patricia Lipovsky
- Donte Mickens (Committee Chair)
- Earline Bessie Outman

The Council held a discussion about the participation of members awaiting appointment, non-voting members, and members of the public involvement in the subcommittees.

The By-Law Subcommittee plans to meet March 10th at 10:00a.m.

Robert Kelly made a motion to adjourn, Bruce Miles seconded the motion. The motion passed.