

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2020

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large, Secretary
Erika Evans, At-Large
Bill Johnson, AER
Basil Julian, Lions
Theresa Petrey, ACB
Teresa Sheeler, NFB, Chair
Stephanie Smith, ASBVI

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron, BVA
James Caton, ASBVI
Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB
Lisa Reynolds, AER
Sandy Rowland for Harold Brewer, VFP
Larry Wayland, FAIRS

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

June Richardson, OIB

ADWS Representative: Dr. Charisse Childers, ADWS Director

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

Governor's Office Representative: None

Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) Board Meeting Support Staff: Betsy Barnes, Megan Lamb, Mason Murphey, Jim Pearson, Theresa Bertram, and Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes.

Others Present: None at this teleconference.

Motion to Approve the Meeting Agenda

Keith Clark moved, and Erika Evans seconded the motion to approve the agenda for the meeting. The motion carried.

Motion to Approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting on March 13, 2020

Bill Johnson moved, and Keith Clark seconded a motion to accept the minutes. The motion carried.

Address from Director of the Division of Workforce Services (ADWS) – Dr. Charisse Childers

Division of Workforce Services (DWS) Director, Dr. Charisse Childers, addressed the Board. She mentioned that she appreciated DSB staff throughout the state for working with DWS in the

local offices. She mentioned that Arkansas' unemployment rate for the month of April was 10.2%, while the national average for that month was 14.2%. The unemployment rate for May is expected to increase. This makes it more difficult for clients to find or return to work. Some companies have recognized that work can be done from home. This may open new opportunities to employ clients of DSB and DWS. Director Childers also stated that she expects a memo from Governor Asa Hutchinson's regarding his directive on June 10, 2020 which stated government category 2 workers are to return to work the following Monday, June 15, 2020. This includes people who are not "at risk" for health problems. She further stated that, as far as she knew, there were not any staff reductions since the beginning of the COVID-19 virus, and she was looking forward to all employees getting back to work to serve Arkansas citizens. Dr. Childers invited DSB Board members and employees to email her with questions.

Director's Report – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, DSB Director

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes provided the DSB Director's report. The previous quarter of the SFY20 was very busy and productive for the Division of Services for the Blind. DSB was excited about the upcoming State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 and busy planning activities for the new year. She reported that the DSB Director's Report is an opportunity for her to update the DSB Board on the many tasks performed by DSB Staff during the quarter and some upcoming projects that the Board may want to calendar.

State Plan Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes reported that the Arkansas WIOA Combined State Plan was approved on May 29, 2020. Technical Assistance may still be provided for each of the individual programs, but the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has accepted the goals and objectives approved by the DSB Board. DSB is in the process of creating a tracking mechanism to ensure they keep the Board updated each quarter on how services are being provided statewide. Dr. Williams Stokes expressed a thank you to each board member who supported DSB by participating in training and recommendations to improve service delivery.

COVID-19 Update – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

The challenges DSB faced this quarter with delivery of services despite COVID-19 were unique. Most DSB staff continued to work from home to adhere to social distancing guidelines and Governor's directive. The COVID-19 social distancing guidelines dictated DSB's efforts to implement staff and consumer operations this quarter. Staff used virtual communication and offered drive through technology services to interact with consumers and will continue do so until the Governor provides new guidance for State employees. Additionally, DSB purchased gloves, hand sanitizer, masks, and cleaning supplies for all offices and distributed the items to each local DSB office.

Budget for State Fiscal Year 2021 (SFY-21) – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes gave a report on the DSB budget for the State Fiscal Year 2021 (SFY-21). The budget for SFY21 was submitted to the Department of Finance Administration (DFA). DSB anticipates the appropriation to be \$10,244,272 to provide administrative and programmatic support services beginning July 1, 2020.

Staff Update Report – Betsy Barnes

DSB has 54 employed (of 78) staff or 75% of positions filled. The governor currently has a hiring freeze in place. DSB is waiting to fill twenty-two positions when the hiring freeze is lifted. Interviews have been conducted, and selections have been made. DSB will confirm how many of the applicants remain interested or available when the agency can move forward with the hiring process. The plan is to re-classify two positions and add them to the QA team as Auditors. Kena Sabb retired after 35 years of service on May 29th. Kandy Cayce will retire June 30th after 40 years of service. DSB wishes them the very best and they will be sorely missed.

Quality Assurance (QA) Report – Betsy Barnes

Assistant Director, Betsy Barnes, gave a report on Quality Assurance. The DSB Quality Assurance staff work very hard to keep the AWARE system updated. An OIB module has been added to the system. A new QA Tool module was added to enable the DSB auditor and staff to conduct case reviews. DSB has implemented “secondary approval for authorizations” for the managers, to be effective July 1st. In July, DSB plans for installment of the AWARE 6.8 upgrade. When changes are implemented the QA Supervisor, Crystal Anderson, provides the necessary training for DSB staff. Since the last DSB board meeting in March, Ms. Anderson conducted Regional Technical Assistance sessions on Eligibility, Supervision of QA Tool training, DSB Payment Process in AWARE, and OIB Services and reporting. Upcoming trainings include, secondary approval for authorizations, and regional technical assistance sessions on planning and authorization of services. The QA Tool Procedure Guide was sent out in March.

The DSB internal Auditor, Lisa Fore, completed the first round of reports to include the Intake Audit report. These case reviews included several reports: application and intake, eligibility, services, employment, and comprehensive.

The DSB RSA-911 report for Program Year 2019 (PY-19), 3rd Quarter was submitted on May 7th.

Staff Development Report – Betsy Barnes

A positive outcome of COVID-19 has been that staff has been able to take advantage of a wide range of on-line training opportunities. Every week staff share information from OIB-TAC,

WINTAC, Helen Keller Rehab Center, and a wide range of resources. DSB staff have provided feedback on the trainings and made recommendations for courses for other staff. All staff will develop their 2021 Professional Development Plan and review with their supervisors during their PGCS reviews. DSB currently has seven staff enrolled in Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling, and one counselor is enrolled in the Orientation and Mobility of the Blind program at UALR. Two of these will graduate by 2021. One counselor recently graduated and has applied to take her CRC.

Field Services Report – Dr. Megan Lamb

At the time of this meeting most of the DSB field staff were working from home. While working at home, DSB staff continued to maintain contact and ensure services are provided to their consumers. Staff submitted a daily itinerary of their time to their supervisor for review. Based on the reports from AWARE, staff continue to authorize and pay for services as well as provide direct services to our consumers. Staff have been able to continue successfully closing cases of employed individuals during this time, which is wonderful news.

Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) – Dr. Megan Lamb

DSB has continued to work very hard to ensure that the OIB Program's transition to being provided by DSB's counselors and staff is as smooth as possible. As part of this process we are continuing to work with the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC). They have reviewed our drafts of policy, procedures, and training guides. The draft of the OIB Policy was sent to the OIB-TAC and their comments are now being reviewed and added to the draft so that a final draft can be prepared for review.

Fiscal Close Out – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Megan Lamb gave a report on the Field Services Year End Close Out. The week of this meeting, DSB worked with staff on their fiscal close out process. As of Monday, June 15, 2020 all authorizations should have been closed out for this State Fiscal Year (SFY-20).

Jump Start – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Megan Lamb gave a report on the Jump Start program. DSB's first ever Virtual Jump Start began on June 8, 2020. A total of 20 students were participating in the virtual program at the time of this meeting. Each of these students participated in a virtual work-based learning experience. Additionally, DSB staff worked to provide sessions on a variety of topics relating to workplace readiness and self-advocacy for the students. Students met with staff and presenters using Zoom.

DSB Staff Training – Dr. Megan Lamb

While working from home, DSB staff have been provided information on the numerous trainings available to them online by WINTAC, CSAVR, and any other sources. In addition to the OIB trainings discussed earlier, the Quality Assurance team met with each region virtually to discuss their individual area performance on Intake and Eligibility. The QA Team will be continuing with Planning and Authorizing Services and offer virtual training on creating authorizations for support staff to ensure they are familiar with the process and understand the documentation necessary for submitting payments. The training is part of our goal to improve accuracy and consistency across the state.

Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) – Dr. Megan Lamb.

Dr. Megan Lamb gave a report on progress with the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC). DSB is continuing to work with WINTAC. They meet with the Pre-ETS Team monthly to develop strategies for effectively spending their Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) budget under the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) guidelines. WINTAC has offered feedback to DSB on their policy drafts and continues to review new drafts as they are sent to them. WINTAC also continues to work with Quality Assurance (QA) and Field Services to review their data validation and internal controls.

DSB POLICY Manual – Megan Lamb

Dr. Megan Lamb gave a report on the DSB Policy Manual revision. At the time of this meeting, DSB had an updated draft for most of the policy manual. Each draft is being reviewed by the Field Administrator, WINTAC, and the DSB Internal Controls Roundtable Committee before being considered final. As these chapters are completed, they will be brought to the DSB Board for approval. Ms. Betsy is working to prepare the three chapters approved by the Board in December for public comment as required for promulgation.

VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM (VFP) ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT – JIM PEARSON

Jim Pearson gave the report for the Vending Facility Program (VFP). He reported that most highway locations are open for business. The exceptions are the two White River sites. At the time of this meeting, VFP Sales were down about 50%. The big truck travel has been consistent with sales. During the ongoing health crisis, all manned locations were closed except the Health Department site in Little Rock. Due to COVID-19 issues, only vending machines were in operation. Vending sales are drastically reduced from normal operations due to employees at these locations working from home. Mr. Pearson reported that the VFP program had three vacant locations and need trainees for managers in these locations. Sandy Rowland, sitting in for Vending Program President Harold Brewer, asked for clarification of new policies to be put in place. He said he did not know when he would be able to get back into his location. Jim

Pearson stated that the Vending Program is working to finalize those policies and will deal one-on-one with each manager beginning in July and August for training on the updated policy.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Changes

Mr. Pearson reported that the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is requiring DSB to make many changes in the operations of the program. Most changes will start on re-opening of the sites, in the next fiscal year, as early as August, or January 1, 2021. The goal is to make managers independent entrepreneurs and less dependent on the Vending Facility Program.

Computer and Technology Lab Report

Mr. Pearson's reported that the Computer and Technology Lab (Tech Lab) staff were only providing phone evaluations for clients during COVID-19. Staff have not been able to do any in-person training in the technical lab between counselors and clients because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) – Theresa Bertram

Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) supervisor Theresa Bertram provided an update on AIRS. Regarding the Arkansas Information Reading Services, (AIRS), staff are working mostly from home to enhance existing programs and improve content relevant for blind and visually impaired consumers. DSB continues to provide local information and programs that are not offered or geared towards the blind community and has added a Monday through Friday 60-minute pandemic update focusing on news of particular use to persons who are blind or visually impaired. The Radio and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AIRSradio/>) is updated almost daily with shows and posts from the Governor, as well as ACB and NFB. Audio programs can also be found on AIRS YouTube page (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzUliUjmhf5Pam3r_k4Lg6A/videos). Training for all AIRS staff is being researched and will begin soon. Friends of the Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS) had two meetings this past month to discuss programming and what they can add to improve shows. The number of listeners for airs.org is up to 2,700 per week; AETN has increased to 200 because kids are listening to AETN on their cell phones; and NEWSLINE is approximately 300, with 30-35 active listeners in addition to regular shows. Mrs. Bertram stated that she is working to schedule a training with Scott White, NFB Newsline Director to train AIRS and DSB with the goal of reaching more people.

OLD BUSINESS

Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) UPDATE – Dr. Megan Lamb

Dr. Megan Lamb reported on the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). Currently, the Division of Services for the Blind is in Program Year 2019 which runs from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. DSB has submitted three of the four quarters of data at the time of this meeting. Using the RSA 911 reports that are submitted each quarter, DSB reported the following Performance Indicators, for their agency, for this program year: the Employment Rate for the 2nd Quarter After Exit was at 50%; the Employment Rate for the 4th Quarter After Exit was at 54%; the Employment Retention Rate was at 93%; the Employee Median Earnings was \$5655.99; the Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) was 62, Split Between Secondary and Post-Secondary; and, Credentials Attained for this period was four. A Measured Skill Gain is defined as something that can be measured, like a master's degree or a job skill certification. The client can only receive credit for one MSG per report even if the client receives more than one during the same period.

2020 DSB Consumer of the Year Process – Dr. Megan Lamb

Field Supervisor, Dr. Megan Lamb, reported on the 2020 Consumer of the Year (COY) process for DSB. While the Division of Services for the Blind were not meeting with consumers face to face, they were continuing with the Consumer of the Year process. Each counselor has been assigned a month in which their Consumer of the Year nomination is due to DSB administration. Once that submission and the consumer's signed release has been received, DSB will order the trophy for the consumer, and the employer, to be sent to the counselor's local office.

2020 DSB Employee of the Year Process – Betsy Barnes

DSB Assistant Director, Betsy Barnes reported on the 2020 Employee of the Year (EOY) process for DSB. At the time of this meeting, DSB completed their Performance, Goal Compensation System (PGCS) process and had several staff that received exceptional ratings as Role Model and Highly Effective. DSB may have to cancel the in person statewide meeting to meet COVID-19 guidelines. Ms. Barnes stated that DSB will work with the Board to determine if DSB can honor an Employee of the Year, and how they would do so virtually. She stated that the DSB Board Chairman may wish to appoint a committee to conduct the selection process

Terry Sheeler said they would get information about the EOY Committee to Ms. Barnes.

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the DSB Statewide meeting requires a contract with a hotel. She asked whether the DSB Board might consider having the virtual recognition awards. The hotel will be notified that the statewide meeting will be cancelled to avoid paying a penalty to the

hotel. Board member Erika Evans asked whether the hotel, or DSB cancelled the Field Services meeting to be held in July. Dr. Williams-Stokes responded that DSB cancelled the field staff meeting and were charged a penalty. The requirement was to cancel more than 90 days in advance to not be charged a penalty. She stated that if DSB needs to cancel due to COVID-19 it should be more than 90 days ahead of the reservation with the hotel.

Mr. Bill Johnson asked Dr. Childers what other state departments are doing with virtual meetings and what she would recommend for the Statewide Meeting in December. Dr. Charisse Childers responded that the 90-day cancellation for this meeting was sooner than most. She mentioned that changes would have to be made with restrictions on buffets and spacing people out during meetings. To her knowledge, there were no meetings scheduled within state government other than those in the Fall. At the time of this meeting, all the meetings were taking place remotely with Zoom. For individual rooms many hotels have been good to allow cancellation, but for a contracted meeting with a large group, and banquets to take place, the hotels were less lenient because of the expense involved. Mr. Bill Johnson said he would like to move forward with a Zoom meeting for the December statewide meeting. Mrs. Teresa Petrey said that Zoom does have a way for non-sighted people to join by telephone and that video cameras are not necessary to attend a Zoom meeting.

Bill Johnson asked if Director Williams-Stokes would like to recommend that the annual DSB Statewide meeting be a Zoom meeting. Cassandra Williams-Stokes stated she would ask the Board to okay this change because there were several DSB Board activities tied with the meeting including Board training, the Employee of the Year and Consumer of the Year presentations, and other activities, during the meeting. Board Chair Terry Sheeler asked for any opposed to making DSB Statewide in December 2020 a Zoom meeting to speak and none did.

2020 Employee Performance Goal Compensation System (PGCS) 2020 Implementation – Betsy Barnes

Assistant Director, Betsy Barnes, reported that DSB supervisors completed and entered all Performance, Goal, and Compensation System (PGCS) information for the staff they supervise. In May, new instructions were provided, and different forms were required. Everything was finally submitted on May 29th. In a few weeks, DSB should receive approval for supervisors to review the PGCS's with their staff. The Governor indicated that there will be a review of merit increases in the Fall to ensure adequate resources are available.

Budget for State Fiscal Year 2021 (SFY-21) – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Dr. Williams-Stokes reported on the budget earlier during the meeting but added that DSB received information on moving forward that any legislation they plan to give to the Board

should go through Dr. Childers, Secretary Preston and the Governor's office. The recommendations in draft form will be due in November to Secretary Preston, but DSB will need to have it ready before that time. She also stated that if the budget for SFY-21 of \$10,244,272.00 changes she will let Chair Terry Sheeler know before July 1st.

State Plan Report – Dr. Megan Lamb

Our staff worked very hard to complete the plan and enter it into the WIOA Portal. After they received some revisions requested by RSA, Staff completed the state plan and it has been approved. Now the goal is to ensure that we monitor and track progress towards our goals in the state plan. In March, DSB had a performance measure negotiation meeting with RSA and ARS. The focus of the meeting was to negotiate the target that would be set for Measurable Skill Gains for the State of Arkansas. The rate of MSG for Arkansas was 22.7% (PY17) and 25.2% (PY18). After meeting with ARS, we agreed to recommend a target of 24% for the next two program years (Program Years 20 and 21). The call with RSA reviewed our information and they asked to see growth each year. Therefore, the negotiation agreed to show 24% for PY20 and 25% for PY21. DSB is confident they can meet this rate as our internal rate shows to be at over 50%. However, the state rate is different because it was combined with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services.

Low Vision Training – Betsy Barnes

Assistant Director, Betsy Barnes, reported on DSB Blindness and Low Vision Staff Training. DSB staff has taken advantage of the wide range of on-line training opportunities during their time away from work, because of the health crisis. This included trainings in Older Individuals who are Blind – Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC). Crystal Anderson recently conducted an OIB training for DSB staff. This training focused on the federal regulations and definition of services that can be provided and documented in service plans and authorizations. DSB arranged with OIB-TAC to conduct a virtual training July 9 and 10th at the July Field Services training. They will cover Low Vision and the OIB Assessment tool. They will also conduct an open forum on questions and concerns about OIB services. DSB is working to have a presentation on the national service NFB NEWSLINE.

Quarterly Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Board Report – Terry Sheeler

For the Quarterly OIB Board meeting June Richardson was not present during this teleconference. Terry Sheeler reported that OIB had a new Advisory Council with Keith Clark to serve as Chairman, Sandy Edwards to serve as vice-chair, and Pat Smith to serve as secretary. The OIB contract with World Services for the Blind (WSB) ends on June 30th. There were no outstanding contracts and OIB services would be provided by DSB counselors.

Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Service (FAIRS) – Larry Wayland

Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Service (FAIRS) president, Larry Wayland, provided an update. Mr. Wayland stated that Theresa Bertram provided a good and informative report. He added that FAIRS met by teleconference. The corona virus has changed things for the organization. They did need to go to the bank to get their address moved to the DSB post office box but have not been able to get this done with the virus. He was encouraged by the rise in AIRS listening and subscription numbers.

Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) Report – Tom Masseau

Tom Masseau was not present to give a report for Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA).

Arkansas State Independent Living Counsel (ARSILC) – Dr. Sha’ Anderson

Arkansas State Independent Living Counsel (ARSILC) Director Sha Anderson was not present and no report was provided. Board Chair Terry Sheeler stated that the SILC Director’s reports for March, April, and May 2020 were included in the packet sent to the DSB Board.

Consumer Input

American Council of the Blind (ACB) – Theresa Petry

Mrs. Theresa Petry gave a report for the American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the state chapter, the Arkansas Council of the Blind. The Arkansas Council of the Blind did not hold their previously scheduled conference on April 17th and 18th, but had a conference call on Saturday, April 18th. Mrs. Petrey reported they did not have an election, because it was not an in-person meeting. The American Council of the Blind will hold their virtual national conference July 3rd through 10th. Those interested need to register by June 21st. Subjects to be discussed will be electronic tablets, macs, and PC computers. Mrs. Petrey serves as an officer for the ACB at both federal and state levels. She is the secretary of the 23rd chapter of the American Council of the Blind Board, and at the state level she is the first vice-president of the Arkansas Council of the Blind.

National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas (NFB) – Terry Sheeler

Teresa “Terry” Sheeler, State President of National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas, announced the dates of the coming national and state conventions. The NFB national convention for 2020 will take place by virtual meeting from July 14th through 18th, with Zoom as the main platform. The registration deadline is June 15th and is free at nfb.org/registration. Ms. Sheeler asked that people spread the word and help make this their best-attended convention ever. The agenda is scheduled to be out May 25th. NFB President, Mark Riccobono, has been

presenting the President's Release Live on Zoom for those who would like to join those events. They are also holding many virtual events on Zoom.

The schedule for the 2020 National Convention is as follows:

Tuesday, July 14: Seminars

Wednesday, July 15: Board Meeting and Resolutions Day

Thursday, July 16: Division Day and Opening Ceremonies

Friday July 17: Presidential Report, General Sessions, and Affiliate Caucus

Saturday July 18, Business Meeting, Resolutions, and Banquet

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) State Convention 2020

They are still on for meeting in person for the NFB State Convention which will take place on November 6th and 7th, at Holiday inn, Springdale, 1500 S 48th St., Springdale, AR 72762. Registration is \$80.00. You can registrar at nfbar.org The Host Committee for our State Convention will be NFB of NWA. We are also accepting applications for 7 positions of the 9 that will be up for elections on the National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas Affiliate Board. For a State Board Application, please contact: Nena Chadwick, she can be reached at nenachadwick232@hotmail.com

Next DSB Board Meeting will be Friday, September 11, 2020. Tentatively scheduled as a teleconference.

The Meeting was adjourned.