

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2018

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large  
Sandra Edwards, ACB  
Erika Evans, At-Large  
Bill Johnson, AER  
Basil Julian, LIONS  
Terry Sheeler, NFB  
Stephanie Smith, ASBVI

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron, BVA  
James Caton, ASBVI  
James Gatewood, Vendors  
June Richardson, OIB  
Lisa Reynolds, AER  
Larry Wayland, FAIRS

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

None

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB

DHS Representative: None

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

Governor's Office Representative: None

**DSB Board Meeting Support Staff:** Betsy Barnes, Charlie Cain-Davis, Kandy Cayce, Mary Douglas, LaTasha Mays, Mason Murphey, Amber Neal, Jim Pearson, Brian Sanders, Tina Shores, Lou Talley, and Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes.

**Others Present:** Anthony Sheeler, NFB.

**Approval of the Agenda:** Keith Clark moved, and Bill Johnson seconded the approval of the agenda for the meeting. The motion carried.

**Approval of the Minutes of the Meeting from September 14, 2018:** Basil Julian moved, and Keith Clark seconded a motion to accept the minutes from last Board meeting. The motion carried.

**Ms. Sheeler introduced Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes as the new Director for the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).**

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

Newly appointed DSB Director Williams-Stokes thanked the Board for working with the Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson in naming a new Director for the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Director Williams-Stokes introduced Department of Human Services (DHS) Deputy Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, Jeff Williams. Mr. Williams stated that he is a former State Representative from Springdale, and will take over some of the roles from Kelley Link, Chief of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, including all of the Children's Affairs, all of the Youth

Services, and services we provide at DSB. He indicated that he intends to make sure the message of DSB is shared with the legislature, other governmental organizations including the local offices, and the Governor's office.

Director Williams-Stokes thanked the DSB Board for attending the Board meeting and the annual Board training on Thursday, December 13, 2018. She noted that she has followed up with the Governor's office, and there have not been any new members appointed or reappointed to the DSB Board.

## **National Issues**

### **The Workforce Innovative and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

The State Plan for the Workforce Innovative and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the guide DSB uses to track and report progress to Rehabilitation Services Administration. WIOA is always a priority because it is our governing legislation. The WIOA State Plan that was developed with the other core partners helps us to address the needs of our consumers.

### **Needs Assessment**

DSB is in the process of developing the criteria for the statewide comprehensive needs assessment. Five years ago, DSB staff were involved in this assessment and spoke with consumers at the grassroots level to determine what the needs for blind citizens in Arkansas. We have met with the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville to discuss their role as a possible vendor during this process. We will look at the consumer groups for feedback to improve how we operate at DSB. Also, we will review success with existing partners, and how we can navigate our resources together to meet the needs of our consumers. We plan to schedule a follow-up meeting with U of A Fayetteville after the New Year to review the process.

### **Federal Reporting**

One of the major assignments in federal reporting to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is RSA-2 Report. Many DSB employees have worked hands-on, and for the last forty-five days have contributed to the RSA-2 Report. The RSA-2 entails all program and fiscal related activities completed during the federal fiscal year. The report demonstrates how we expend federal and state dollars, and provides detailed progress related to the grant award. Our goal is to expend every penny according federal and state guidelines to ensure we remain in compliance. We have spent all our money for this year and completed the process a couple of weeks early.

The RSA-722 is a report to the RSA on any appeals that DSB had during the fiscal year. Any ongoing disputes must also go on record. Regarding appeals with Disability Rights, we need to make sure Disability Rights Association (DRA) sends back any reports for this year. DRA did send reports back to us, and we were able to resolve those issues. DSB reported zero appeals for FFY2018. We were able to resolve all our issues before the end of the year.

The FFY 2018 7-0B report, which is our Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) report to RSA has been submitted. We worked with World Services for the Blind (WSB) with Sharon Giovinazzo and

Dr. Janet Ford. The information they provided was invaluable to DSB submitting the report in a timely manner. Erin Cates was also instrumental with coordinating and verifying that the information received was consistent with DSB records.

### **National and State Conferences for 2019**

The National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) spring conference will be held in April, and the Board will have to decide who will attend. DSB did receive written prior approval from RSA for the Board to attend both meetings in the spring and fall of 2019.

The DSB staff members attending The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehab (CSAVR), and The National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) are Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Betsy Barnes, and the new DSB Chief Fiscal Officer who will start work on December 31, 2018. Dr. Williams-Stokes will also attend New Directors training in Bethesda, Maryland, April 6-12, 2019.

Additionally, DSB must submit requests to RSA if the Board wishes to continue to send members to out of state consumer group meetings. These consumer groups are American Council of the Blind (ACB) and The National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Both groups will meet in July, 2019. Dr. Williams-Stokes will wait until the beginning of the federal fiscal year to submit requests with RSA. We will have an update on those requests for the next Board meeting.

### **Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFA) – Progress**

Dr. Williams Stokes indicated that the main issues with the co-location process included inaccurate cost estimates presented by the local workforce centers. The agency created a budget to reflect costs paid to DHS for existing leases. DSB is in the process of completing the Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs) to remain in compliance with WIOA. She stated that the main concern is for DSB to be able to remain within the budget and have personnel to meet consumer demands. DSB continues to move forward to establish an electronic presence in the comprehensive Department of Workforce (DWS) sites. The comprehensive sites are the larger Workforce centers around the state. An electronic presence means that we will only have a phone presence, but we may be charged for use of other areas in the facility. Mr. Pearson will explain this in his Vending Facility Program (VFP) report.

### **Workforce Board Meeting**

The Arkansas Workforce Development Board Meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2019 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel-Little Rock. The agenda notes that Governor Asa Hutchinson is listed to speak. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the agenda will be emailed to the DSB Board for informational purposes.

## **State Issues**

### **Budget**

DSB had a DHS Legislative Budget Hearing in November, and the budget passed. We will be ready for the State Fiscal Year 2020.

### **Recruitment**

DSB has a position freeze in place with a cap of 70 positions. We are authorized for 78 positions, but we are only authorized to fill seventy of those. Position freezes can be a barrier to providing consumer services in regional areas. We have requested a release of those eight positions. We do have the option to request release on a case-by-case basis to hire one of those eight positions, but we have not been in the position to ask for that. We have had many retirements in the last six months. Robert “Scott” Murphy recently retired from the Vending Facility Program (VFP) and Sally Mahan will retire next week, and she has been with us for 35 years.

### **Performance Evaluations**

Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked the Board for attending the training for the new performance evaluation system. One of the requirements of WIOA, and the Rehab Act, is that a supervisory board, like the DSB Board, must be very knowledgeable about the system they oversee how the employees are evaluated. This promotes transparency and promotes a clear policy for disciplinary actions, including termination. The DSB Board needs to be aware of how our personnel system works.

### **Statewide Meeting**

DSB staff participated in training this week focused on “Embracing Change” and “The Philosophy of Change”. We will continue training to ensure staff understand what is occurring during the Transformation to DWS and to make sure we are prepared to provide quality services to persons who are blind or visually impaired.

### **Monthly Report**

Dr. Williams-Stokes indicated that she will provide a monthly report to the DSB Board members on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. The first report will begin in February for the month of January. She also stated that DSB is thankful to the Board members who take time out of their schedule to attend meetings and training sessions.

### **Other Issues**

Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that a letter was received from Beverly Kindle, who just resigned from the DSB Board. The letter from Ms. Kindle noted mistreatment from DHS employees that allegedly occurred in the Little Rock Donaghey Plaza vending area. DSB reported the complaint to DHS Deputy Director Keesa Smith regarding options to deter employees from acting unprofessionally in the vending area. We also met with DHS Chief of Security, Brian Marr to develop a plan to prevent future occurrences. The issues will also be addressed at the January VFP committee meeting.

Concludes Director’s Report

### **Vending Facility Program (VFP) – Jim Pearson**

To update the Board on the Vending Facility Program (VFP), Beverly Kindle did resign from the facility. Ms. Kindle's letter mentioned some concerns that can happen in any retail establishment including theft, customer complaints, and rude behavior. DSB does try to meet all suggestions and recommendations to give good customer service. Ms. Kindle's place at the DSB Cafeteria has been filled by Sherrill Owens. We do have two openings. Pulaski Tech and the Federal Building are vacant. The Federal Building will require additional background checks to fill that position. We have two consumers in training now. The VFP set-aside funds for the managers have decreased because of the revenues from these facilities decreasing.

### **VFP Staff Updates**

Our accountant Robert "Scott" Murphy has retired, and Debra Newton is taking his place. Our Technology Supervisor, Elizabeth Whitaker resigned for personal reasons. We are in the process of recruiting to hire someone to replace her position. Director Williams-Stokes has provided a quick turnaround to advertise positions which has helped the VFP hire new employees in a timely manner.

### **Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFA)**

DSB is currently trying to put together Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs). Under WIOA we are required to have a presence at the comprehensive sites. There are about 25 comprehensive sites throughout the state, and about thirty affiliate sites. The Governor's plan is to put us under the Department of Commerce which will put us under the Division of Workforce Services (DWS). We will try to prevent having a lease with both DHS and the local workforce center to align with our budget. Cost-sharing with other WIOA partners is required in the IFA agreements. For example, one local center proposed we pay \$27,000 for a lease, versus \$3600 per person now at DHS. We have renegotiated with them, pointing out that we have our own laptop and MiFi. They are going to deduct those charges and provide us with a figure that works for the budget. In the meantime, we will establish an electronic phone presence only. We will still have janitorial costs, electrical costs, a data cost, and other costs, but we are trying to get those costs down. We are hoping to get our costs down to \$500 - \$1000 for each lease before we can move in to these facilities. We need to account for each charge when we answer to Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Some of these agreements are 30 pages may be a lengthy process.

Concludes Vending Facility Program Report

### **Field Services Report – Betsy Barnes**

#### **Staff Updates**

DSB Field Administrator, Betsy Barnes thanked the field supervisors for their hard work. She reported on changes in DSB staff. Jason Addis is the new Vocational Rehab (VR) Counselor in Fort Smith. LaTasha Age will begin in Pine Bluff on Jan 14<sup>th</sup>. DSB is in the process of hiring administrators in Fayetteville and Fort Smith. The Fort Smith office needs to replace Sally Mahan who is set to retire after 35 years of service. Ms. Barnes thanked Ms. Mahan for her service. We have also promoted an Administrative Specialist in Fayetteville, Heather Grigsby, to a VR counselor. DSB

also has vacancies of Pre-ETS Counselors in Harrison and West Memphis, and VR Counselors in West Memphis, El Dorado, Texarkana, Pine Bluff, and Little Rock. She noted that each Area Supervisor is carrying a caseload because of shortages in counselor personnel.

### **Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

Ms. Barnes reported that, as this year comes to an end, the DSB Field Services Staff has focused on meeting the challenges of WIOA and emphasizing quality services. DSB continues to participate with the WIOA Executive Roundtable and recently coordinated an application for Maximizing WIOA Performance Data. We continue to have staff at every Local Workforce Board meeting. In September, DSB had a WIOA Partners meeting in Hot Springs, and can see real progress as we work together to serve those most in need.

### **Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center Agreement (WINTAC)**

DSB has a contract with the WINTAC consortium, which is made up of consultants in the areas of Pre-ETS, VR, transition services, increasing supported employment, performance measures, and business engagement. Five WIOA trainers have been brought to meet DSB at our statewide meeting. We continue to meet on the phone once a month. In September, Linda Mock joined us to conduct strategic planning for our Business Engagement program. She will return when we fill our business Engagement Coordinator position that became vacant at the end of October.

### **WINTAC in 2019**

There will be a Career Index Plus, which is a Labor Market Information Program. There will also be a Career Pathways training they will bring to us. This will involve connecting training, education, and support services to gain credential attainment, and employment. In addition, they have told Ms. Barnes they would like her to be part of a pilot program, which they will discuss at the next meeting. They will also do a program assessment with us.

### **Deaf-Blind**

We plan to meet with the Children and Youth with Sensory Impairments (CAYSI) and a consultant with the Helen Keller Institute to explore ways we can serve the deaf-blind students in Arkansas. We will work with Goodwill and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to implement a project at Goodwill.

### **Case Reviews**

Lou Talley continues to lead the case review team in reviewing the 2017 closed cases. This should be the last round of full reviews since the 2018 cases are reviewed as we progress through the year. Case review process will help us to be within compliance for state and federal audits. We do not know if RSA will audit us this year, but DSB will be better prepared if the audit occurs.

### **Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB)**

We continue to work on our long and short term goals for the OIB program, and spent two or three days working with consultants from Mississippi State on these goals. We have identified these goals and are working on them now. Crystal Anderson is working to add a module in the AWARE automated case file management system to accommodate our OIB caseloads.

### **White Cane Safety Day**

Some of you joined us for White Cane Safety Day at World Services for the Blind in October. We had a wonderful program with State Representative Charlene Fite, who was our keynote speaker.

### **Consumer of the Year (COY)**

All COY nominations were submitted to the DSB Board Committee and we look forward to honoring the statewide winner, and their employer at the luncheon today.

### **Staff Attended**

DSB staff participated in the WIOA Partners meetings in Hot Springs. We attended the Disability Policy Consortium sponsored by many organizations in the disability community, to include DSB. The Arkansas State Independent Living Council (ARSILC) had a conference in October that we attended. We went to the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) conference in Hot Springs. Several of us went to Long Beach, CA, for The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehab (CSAVR) conference. The Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) attend both AER and the Transition conference in November. Ms. Barnes indicated that she participated in the National Rehab Leadership Institute in San Diego, California.

In 2019 DSB is going to continue to meet the challenge of WIOA, and she wished everyone Happy Holidays in 2019.

Concludes Field Administrator's Report.

### **WIOA Continued – Dr. Williams-Stokes**

The Rehab act states that DSB must have qualified staff, and part of that means that we have had to work continuously with various staff, VR Counselors, Director, etc. Several of our counselors have gone back to school to earn a Master's in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling degree and obtained their certification in Rehab Counseling. Dr. Williams-Stokes recognized staff who received degrees or certification while working for DSB.

She also stated that, historically, DSB offered more specialized services than are available today. Due to budget requirements, some of those services were stopped. As more of our staff receive their specialized training, we should be able to increase specialized services for consumers.

Dr. Williams-Stokes informed the board that a statistical report is planned for the March Board meeting. Crystal Anderson and Megan Lamb will provide an update regarding progress made in WIOA.

### **Old Business**

Chairman Sheeler continued stating that the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) will have conferences in April and October of 2019. Board members will attend these meetings. Keith Clark will attend the NCSRC spring conference in April, 2019, in Bethesda,

Maryland. In October, Bill Johnson will attend the fall conference in Jacksonville, Florida. Let it be on record that Board members will attend those meetings in 2019.

Another issue Dr. Williams-Stokes brought up is the national conventions for consumer organizations American Council of the Blind (ACB) and The National Federation of the Blind (NFB). A motion was made by Board member Keith Clark that DSB send a Board member to each conference. Board member Bill Johnson seconded the motion.

Board member Bill Johnson asked for clarification regarding the prior approval to attend the out of state events for board members. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that the concern is not coming from Department of Human Services (DHS), but from Rehabilitation Services Administration. RSA wants to ensure states are managing Vocational Rehabilitation funds correctly and have streamlined the process to ensure this occurs in several areas. RSA also wants to ensure each state is held accountable for internal controls and that states are held accountable for board member expenditures.

Chairman Sheeler asked members to vote on the motion, and all members approved the motion to send a Board member to the NFB and ACB National meetings.

#### **DSB Board appointments**

Chairman Sheeler reported that there is still no word from the Governor's office on Board appointments to DSB. DSB Director Williams-Stokes has been corresponding by email with the Governor's office and copying Ms. Sheeler on those messages.

#### **Pre-Education and Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Report – LaTasha Mays**

##### **Student of the Year (SOY)**

LaTasha Mays reported that the Pre-ETS counselors would like to have a Student of the Year (SOY) to recognize students who have excelled in school with grades and extra-curricular activities. The plan is to discuss this with the DSB Board.

##### **Arkansas Rehab Services (ARS)**

DSB continues to have monthly fiscal meetings with Arkansas Rehab Services (ARS) to track expenditures and develop ways to partner and coordinate Pre-ETS activities. DSB is currently on target to spend the funds set aside for Pre-ETS, which is 15%.

##### **Potential Eligibility (PE) Custom Case Type**

Thanks to Crystal Anderson we now have a Potential Eligibility (PE) custom case-type, which allows our Pre-ETS and VR counselors to have dual caseloads. All Pre-ETS staff received training on how to use the new custom case to improve the case management process. Additionally, the process will ensure DSB expends Pre-ETS funds on appropriate Pre-ETS activities.

### **Transition Fairs**

We had our student transition fairs in Little Rock. Tyler Sellers was here yesterday and did an excellent job. He spoke to our students at the transition fair in Little Rock. We also had a transition fair in El-Dorado with Pre-ETS Counselor Darwin Moore.

### **World Services for the Blind (WSB)**

DSB continues with the partnership with WSB with the Student Transition Youth Learning Experience Program (STYLE). The STYLE program is provided throughout the State and at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The students are learning workplace readiness skills and participating in work-related activities to gain first-hand experience. The STYLE program with WSB continues to provide orientation and mobility (O&M) independent living skills, and work experience to students. New report forms have been provided to WSB for consumer reports for payment.

### **Assistive Technology**

We are in the process of setting up our assistive technology loaner program for our Pre-ETS students. The loaner program will be available to all students in Arkansas. Calvin Churchwell will provide assistance to students statewide.

### **Planning in 2019**

DSB would like to partner with more organization in 2019. The goal is to get involved with Project Search. Opportunities for more work-based experiences for our students. We plan to partner with East Initiative to expose our students to technology options. We will continue to offer Jump Start. 2019 Jump Start is scheduled for June 3 through June 21, 2019. Currently, our Pre-ETS counselors are Jacob Grace is in the Northwest area. Darwin Moore is in the El Dorado and Texarkana area. Brent Dozier and Lisa Wilson are in the Little Rock area, and we are going to start planning for Job Search.

Chairman Sheeler inquired about the current number of DSB Pre-ETS students. Ms. Mays responded that DSB currently has 119 Pre-ETS students.

Concludes Pre-ETS report

### **New Business**

#### **Needs Assessment**

Dr. Williams Stokes elaborated on the Needs Assessment process she spoke briefly about in her report. She asked the Board members to inform her of any criteria to include in the process. She stated that a preliminary meeting will be held with U of A Fayetteville to further develop the process.

#### **World Services for the Blind Report (WSB) – Sharon Giovinazzo**

Ex-Officio Board member Sharon Giovinazzo was absent. No report was presented for WSB.

### **Older Individuals who are Blind Report (OIB) – June Richardson**

Ex-Officio Board member June Richardson reported that OIB Committee did not meet for December 2018. They planned meet at the reception after the Board meeting to discuss any concerns.

Dr. Williams-Stokes added that a copy of the RSA 7-OB report was emailed to Ms. Richardson for review.

Chairman Sheeler requested an updated list of Board members to include OIB Chairman, June Richardson's contact information.

Ex-Officio Board member James Gatewood added to the OIB report. Mr. Gatewood stated that he recently became eligible for OIB services and attended a couple of OIB activities. He reported that Dr. Ford was able to get him quickly resolve his eye issues that otherwise would have taken him two or three weeks.

### **Disability Rights of Arkansas (DRA) – Caroline Boch**

Tom Masseur, Executive Director of Disability Rights Arkansas, was not present. Caroline Boch, an attorney for DRA, gave a brief summary. Ms. Boch reported that they have had 15 clients who are blind or low vision. Their requests have included two employment, two education, three client assistance program, one service animal, one assistive technology, one architectural access, two effective communication, and three others. She also reported that they have heard the concerns regarding the vending facility program.

### **Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS) – Larry Wayland**

Larry Wayland, Board member and president of the Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS), reported that the program is doing well. He reminded the Board that FAIRS does again have its 501(3)c, which gives them non-profit status for fund raising. Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) Program Coordinator Shawn Smith is in the process of ordering some back-up equipment. Presently, if the equipment goes down the service will be off the air.

### **NEWSLINE**

One part of FAIRS is NFB-NEWSLINE, which is through the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). This is a service that can be accessed by computer, telephone, and reading technology devices like the Victor Reader Stream. NEWSLINE is free to the blind and visually-impaired in Arkansas. About 350 publications are available. These publications include newspapers from all over the country. DSB is currently spending about \$30,000 a year for this. The service is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

### **Arkansas State Independent Living Council (ARSILC) – Sha Anderson**

Sha Anderson, Executive Director of ARSILC, gave her report. Ms. Anderson noted that ARSILC partnered with DSB as part of the Independent Living Network. She referred to her executive director report that on October 21-23, 2018, they had a successful cross-disability conference at the Capital.

On October 24<sup>th</sup> the post conference event was “Youth Advocacy Day”. There were over one hundred adults, and one hundred and three students with disabilities. Of these there were twenty-two attendees were blind or visually-impaired.

On Monday, October 29<sup>th</sup> they walked to the polls and early voted and got pictures of Brian Sanders wearing headphones for voting. They also did a Facebook live broadcast to bring attention to the disability community and let them know that voting is important. This is an event that ARSILC does bi-annually.

ARSILC has a new way of reporting. The director’s report now ties to goals. The CIL facilities report to provide data as a strategy to show progress, and data drives funding. ARSILC wants to get their data up to get their funding up.

Ms. Anderson noted that she was recently elected as a board member to the Arkansas Homeless Coalition. This is good for the disability community, because it gives them a seat at the table to help serve. Coming up, SILC Congress will take place in February.

### **Consumer Input**

#### **American Council of the Blind (ACB) – Sandy Edwards, Arkansas Chapter Representative**

The ACB State Convention is planned for May 3, 4, and 5, 2019. Please let us know if you have any ideas you want added to the calendar. The ACB National Convention is set for July 5-12, 2019, in Rochester, NY.

#### **National Federation of the Blind (NFB) – Terry Sheeler, Arkansas Representative**

The NFB annual convention will run July 7-12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in Las Vegas, NV at Mandalay Bay. Reservation can be made beginning January 1, 2019. The NFB State convention will be in Hot Springs, AR. Dates have not been confirmed with the hotel yet.

The next Division of Service for the Blind Board meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2019, at the Donaghey Plaza South.

Director Dr. Williams-Stokes announced that the awards luncheon will begin at 11:45 am.

The meeting was adjourned.