

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2016

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

James Caton
Keith Clark
Sandra Edwards
Erika Evans
Bill Johnson
Basil Julian
Terry Sheeler

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

James Gatewood
Sharon Giovinazzo
Lisa Reynolds

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Kara Aaron

DHS Representative: Keesa Smith

Attorney General's Office Representative: Sarah Faris

DSB Staff: Rhonda Austin, Charlie Cain-Davis, Chris Dean, Mary Douglas, Brent Dozier, Lisa Fore, Rhonda Garmon, Linda Haynes, Runar Jensen, Christy Lamas, Ester Lunnie, James McCune, Katy Morris, Debra Newton, Stacye Nichols, Jim Pearson, Kena Sabb, Brian Sanders, Lou Talley, Coral Virden, Liz Whitaker

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Mrs. Terry Sheeler called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA. Motion was made by Mr. Bill Johnson to approve the agenda. Mr. Basil Julian seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

APPROVAL OF 06-10-2016 MINUTES. Motion was made by Basil Julian to approve the June 10, 2016 minutes. Bill Johnson seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Katy Morris

Field Administrator Christy Lamas and I just returned from Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training in Chicago. The first day we met in general conference with federal representatives followed by a more detailed training by the Technical Assistance Center.

I am not convinced that the training resolved many questions regarding the regulations. There were multiple states present, and I think the more we discussed with the federal officials, the more questions we had.

We have several staff out today due to illness, training, retirement or personnel business. One of those is Assistant Director Cassandra Williams, who is busy finalizing the details of her wedding Saturday.

National – DSB was informed recently that thirteen state rehab agencies across the nation were forced to forfeit \$166.7M in vocational rehabilitation funding because their state legislatures were unable to match those federal funds. For years, DSB has been fortunate that the Arkansas General Assembly has continued to fund the division with state dollars at a level adequate to qualify for the funds forfeited by other states. This year, DSB qualified for \$2.065M of those forfeited funds, which remain available for expenditure under the new regulations.

Though WIOA was signed and effective July 22 of 2014, the regulations were delayed by more than two years, which somewhat explains the confusion being experienced by rehab agencies in the interim. Traditionally, Congress makes the laws, and directs the federal officials to develop the regulations, policy directives and technical assistance circulars in accordance with those laws. As state agencies implement the regulations, federal officials then conduct program and fiscal reviews to assess state agency compliance and performance outcome. DSB and ARS are expecting Federal Review sometime in 2017. The process will include the board, and RSA will provide an outline to us ahead of time. DSB staff will manage the logistics, based upon the outline and adjust the schedule daily to fit the requests of the RSA Review Team. As soon as DSB and ARS learn what dates are set for the Review, we will alert everyone.

The Review will likely lean heavily on the WIOA requisites surrounding formal agreements between DSB and our stakeholders. Memorandums of Agreement in prescribed formats are required between organizations involved in the VR process. RSA is providing training and mentoring on the development of acceptable agreements.

State Issues - The future organizational structure of DSB is still unknown. We do expect some form of colocation of local offices because that is specifically addressed in WIOA. In some states they accomplish colocation on paper only. Several DSB staff are scheduled to participate in the semi-annual intensive training organized by DWS, as the lead agency under the combined state plan, at month-end. This is intended to allow staff and reps of the partner agencies to local DSB staff to train side by side with all the other partner entities. The purpose is to give participants a better perspective of where we are now, compared to six months ago when most of the same participants met in West Memphis.

The Governor's Task Force on Employment First is gradually moving forward. The Governor's request for self-identification by state employees who are persons with disabilities was distributed, resulting in about 225 individuals of the 7400 employees in DHS responding affirmatively. The next move for all state agencies is to have their human resources staff members trained to know how to support the efforts of hiring supervisors in this initiative. I am excited to even be a part of this.

DHS Re-organization. Last board meeting we talked about the fact that, effective July 1, DHS Director Cindy Gillespie had scheduled structural changes for DHS, essentially vesting administrative responsibilities in seven "Chiefs" and transferring oversight of staff whose duties fall within those areas. The areas governed by the seven chiefs, such as finance, personnel, etc., happen to be identical to the "non-delegable duties" that RSA regulations require be retained within the designated state unit of each VR agency. For this reason no DSB staff have been reassigned, but they continue to work closely with the seven Chiefs to support the spirit of the reorganization. The one change that could present a problem is a DHS proposed shift in the manner in which funds are drawn and expenses are reported. DSB is so small that we are able to track every dollar and ensure we meet the required match without going over. The federal regulations require that we be able to report financial status "at any point in time". If the changes proposed by DHS compromise this ability, DSB will have to revert to the current method.

Budget – I reported to the Board last quarter that the budget is basically status quo, including imbedding the Miscellaneous Federal Grant for the Pre-Employment Transition Program (Pre-ETS) into the legislative bill, since it is mandated by WIOA. DSB did specifically request \$300,000 in general revenue for the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program, since federal OIB funds are extremely limited and OIB is not eligible to utilize VR funds. One of the points that was made in the justification was that if the medical community is going to step up with \$100,000 annually in pharmaceutical supplies and the Tech community is going to support OIB with all sorts of technological equipment, it is reasonable to look to the state for greater support for what is clearly a growing need.

Let me turn now to the Business and Technology Report. I do want to publicly thank Jim Pearson for serving as Acting Director in the absence of both Cassondra and me early this week, and also many other staff who stepped forward to keep things running smoothly.

Business and Technology Report – Business & Technology Administrator Jim Pearson reported that there have been trying times and changing times. The Tech Lab received the *new computers* for upgrading the agency computers as well as the client training computers in the lab. We are working on changing out those systems. DHS has entered into a new contract with Clear Point to change out systems, but Clear Point may be understaffed to handle the 7500 employees in DHS. DWS received the new computers for the *Kiosks* project this week. We are

working on some software issues and getting all of that changed over and get the upgrades. Ten of those were originally in DWS locations in cities where DSB offices were housed throughout the state. We added another seven where there were two year colleges, so we have 17 kiosks that will be updated and on-line, hopefully, in the next two months. My section is also responsible for the agency *equipment inventory* statewide. We did get that audited and certified and submitted to Legislative Audit. I want to thank Jimmy McCune and Debra Newton for handling a lot of the labor for this project, especially with the outlying DSB offices around the state.

Vending Facility Program (VFP) – The vendors held their annual Sales Seminar in August. It was well attended. We had some good dialogue, good conversations. Our program is struggling right now trying to keep up with the downsizing of a lot of facilities. This is a nationwide trend. If you go to any of the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) meetings across the nation you see that. Seven years ago there were 3,500 managers, today there are less than 2,400. A lot of facilities are being consolidated and annexed (linked contractually) with each other. We recently solicited interest in an annex related to the state capitol facility but no one was interested in the proposal. This forced us to have to staff the State Capitol facility with extra help, rather than a licensed blind vendor right now. But the State Capitol facility is one of the principle locations for the Vending Facility Program. Politically we want to keep that facility operating successfully to demonstrate to the legislature how the vending facility program functions in support of licensed blind vendors.

Highway Contract. The upgrades to our highway contract at White River, Russellville and Social Hill facilities are on target. I visited two of the three facilities. I go to Russellville next week to meet with contractors and the highway department and the facilities are looking great. They are really going to be showpieces for the state of Arkansas. Governor Huckabee introduced the log cabin and stonework effect in the structures at the Texarkana and VanBuren facilities and the look has been carried throughout the upgrades to the façade for the other locations. I think the renovations will help increase sales at highway vending facilities, once the remaining locations come back on-line in December and January of this coming year. Our recent bids for contracts came in less than in previous years. VFP is receiving about 23% of the profit from sales at those facilities. The Highway Department construction contract contains a clause where the contractors could get several thousand dollars more if they complete the renovations in nine to 12 months. That appears to be happening. The structures are already up, the roofs are on several of them. The highway locations have the DSB vending Kiosks built in this time, instead of separate, however they are designed to be in the elements and open 24/7. They should be complete in three to four months and they are all within an hour drive out of Little Rock.

As far as the program itself, VFP Specialist Stacye Nichols was promoted within the agency, so we are without a Specialist and liaison right now in the Vending program. We are in the process of getting that position filled. It is advertised and closes next week. Interested applicants should look for a Fiscal Support Analyst for Services for the Blind. It will list my name as the hiring supervisor. As soon as we

get that position filled, we will do some potential vendor training and try to get that facility opened up in probably mid -January.

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I will be attending the NCSAB Conference in mid- November in San Diego, where they are featuring a special training for the National Business Enterprise Program, which we call the Vending Facility Program here. State Licensing Agencies across the nation have a lot of new program managers and administrators so NCSAB is going to do some basic BEP training as well as train on the new WIOA regulations. Right now NCSAB is dealing with a lot of Department of Defense larger facilities issues as well as standard over-the-counter sales. It looks to be a good training for state licensing agencies and for me as well. I should have some good information to bring back to the managers. ***End of Business and Technology Report.***

Finance & Administrative Operations Report. CFO James McCune, filling in for DSB Assistant Director Cassondra Williams, reported that in the Finance section DSB successfully closed the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2016. The Financial Summary report for the year is included in your packet. We are currently working on finishing the Biennial Budget for state fiscal year 17-19. The federal fiscal year will end September 30, 2016 and compiling Annual Federal Reports will begin and will be due by December 31 of 2016. *Contracts have been renewed* for Arkansas State Independent Living Council, Mainstream and Sources for Independent Living. A contract for NFB Newline is currently being reviewed for renewal. Our *OIB Evaluation Contract* with Mississippi State University will be ending on 9/30/2016 and Mississippi State University has asked for a (no cost to DSB) 3 month extension so they can finish the work specified in the contract. Some of the work that Mississippi State has done for DSB, like Client Satisfaction Surveys, will be returned to in-house, beginning 10/01/2016. *Staff and Board training* – Much WIOA training is going on for both management and direct service staff. Board training and the statewide meeting will occur in tandem with the December board meeting. Final arrangements are pending contracting. A save-the-date notice will be sent shortly. ***End of DSB Operations Report.***

Field Services Report – Field Administrator Christy Lamas reported that on August 19 the ***final regulations*** were published in the Federal Register, and you can find them at 34 CFR Parts 361, 363 and 397. Those parts of the Code of Federal Regulations cover the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program, including Supported Employment and the limitations on youth and subminimum wage. This is the final rule we have been expecting for two years. DSB has already begun the process of working on new procedures, new manual materials, new forms. We are soliciting new vendors in targeted areas, such as ***Customized Employment***. The counselors are in the process of meeting with each of the fourteen (c)organizations holding subminimum wage certificates throughout the state to provide guidance to every potential DSB client on their payrolls, advising them of the benefits of competitive employment and encouraging them to apply to the VR program. That is one charge under WIOA. Another charge is that DSB must document the process of pre- employment transition services under the partnership with the school systems. Previously, identification of potential clients within school systems was sporadic, but under the Act, school systems must make DSB aware of which students are blind or

severely visually impaired, so that DSB can inform those individuals of the benefits of vocational rehabilitation before the students can be placed into a sheltered workshop.

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The Department of Education has been a great partner with us. We are jointly working on the required *Memorandums of Understanding* (MOUs). Something new under WIOA is that DSB can serve students in the high schools who may not necessarily go through the full VR process. The law terms such services as being provided to “*potentially eligible*”. But ‘potentially eligible’ has been defined as being served under 504 Special Education, or being served under an Individual Education Plan. If the students don’t meet those requirements, they do not fit the ‘potentially eligible’ criteria. Another limitation is that there are five core services of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Beyond those *core services*, all other services to these students fall under the regular VR program. Fortunately, for DSB VR and Pre-ETS, this is not currently an obstacle, because we are not under an “Order of Selection”.

Supported Employment has also changed in how we pay a vendor. Under the new rules, we cannot start paying a vendor with Supported Employment Funds until the client actually stays on the job a defined length of time. However, through an initiative called “Vision Quest”, DSB is working closely with the DHS Divisions of Developmental Disabilities and Behavioral Health and with Arkansas Rehab Services to make sure that every entity that is delivering Supported Employment Services is coordinating those services with the other partners. Arkansas already has a three year history in this area as part of “Employment First”. The group is expecting a visit from the federal oversight team in October to examine documents and make recommendations.

WIOA Partnership Meetings. We have a statewide WIOA partners meeting scheduled September 29-30 in Little Rock and the Arkansas Transition Services Partners meeting October 19-20 in Hot Springs. Transition will include all of the school systems throughout the state, along with DSB and ARS counselors and basically anybody who has anything to do with Transition.

Internships. Currently DSB has an intern in Fayetteville and one in West Memphis. Runar Jensen, our Supervisor for the eastern area of the state has been great about various kinds of outreach. He’s got counselors doing TV and radio spots, and there is always an intern in one or both of his offices... so thank you, Runar, for that.

Benefits planning is a mandatory component of vocational rehab services. Brian Sanders is the DSB Benefits Planner and has contacted all of our clients that are on SSI and SSDI and he is working with Social Security to clarify benefits in an employment situation for all of the eligible clients. He has invited them to join the *Talent Acquisition Portal* (TAP) of the National Employment Team. He is the liaison, the messenger, just for our clients. TAP is wonderful and Brian is our front person for it. Brian is also helping us, along with Liz Whitaker, to assess the readiness of the workforce offices to serve our clients throughout the state. We have had some counselors go to the workforce office in Fayetteville, Batesville and Little Rock, and the report

on the *readiness of the Kiosks is not good right now*. We need to make sure that the DWS personnel in the Workforce Centers are well trained and then periodically retrained. Currently, I would not send a client by themselves to the Little Rock Workforce Center to search for in-demand jobs. The Center puts out a really great document on that subject, but when an
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individual asked for access to that document, Little Rock Job Center personnel referred her to Arkansas Rehab Services. When she said she was going to the kiosk, she was told “if you are looking for a job you should go to Arkansas Rehab Services”. Obviously, there is some staff education that needs to be done at the Workforce Centers and it is not happening. The only way this is going to get better is if DSB has a consistent presence there. DWS is our partner and willing to support DSB presence in the centers.

End of Director’s Report

Employee of the Year Committee Recommendations & Board Vote

The DSB 2016 Employee of the Year committee consisted of Mrs. Kara Aaron, Mr. James Gatewood and Mr. Basil Julian. On behalf of the committee, Mr. Julian reported that:

- **Amy Jackson** was recommended as the DSB *Clerical* Employee of the Year;
- **Debra Newton** was recommended as the DSB *Administrative Support* Employee of the Year; and
- **Henry Washington** was recommended as the DSB *Direct Service* Employee of the Year, and,
- Amy Jackson was recommended as the *Overall* DSB Employee of the Year.

Mr. Julian concluded his committee report with the request that the recommendations be accepted for vote of the board. Bill Johnson seconded the motion. **Motion Passed.**

DSB Website. Board Chairman Terry Sheeler apologized that she had not requested to amend the agenda to include discussion of her concern with errors in the DSB website. She stated she had been contacted by a consumer who had been unsuccessful in locating recent board minutes on the DSB website. She then accessed the site herself and was also unable to locate minutes filed recently. This led to her further research of the site and Mrs. Sheeler discovered several other links seemingly missing or broken. DSB Director Katy Morris thanked Mrs. Sheeler for calling this to her attention and committed to have staff check and update the entire site. She noted that DHS had recently updated its website and those of divisions, but that such update should only account for one or two broken links. Mrs. Sheeler noted that she was most concerned with the contact information for the Support Groups.

2016 ACB NATIONAL CONVENTION REPORT

Sandra Edwards expressed her appreciation to the board for sponsoring her attendance to the American Council of the Blind National Convention that was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota,

July 1-9, 2016. A report was submitted with the board packets and is included as a formal part of these minutes.

2016 NFB NATIONAL CONVENTION REPORT

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Terry Sheeler expressed her appreciation to the board for sponsoring her attendance to the National Federation of the Blind Convention that was held in Orlando, Florida, June 30 –July 5, 2016. A report was submitted with the board packets and is included as a formal part of these minutes.

DISABILITY RIGHTS ARKANSAS (DRA)

Chris Stewart reported that Disability Rights Arkansas has been travelling the state looking at the 14(c) certificate holders, the workshops around the state, in light of the new WIOA. Just trying to get an idea of whether participants know about VR services. The response has been different across the state. Some places have a good relationship with the VR program and some people have never heard of these services. DRA wanted to get a baseline to see where things stand and then go from there once the new regulations come out.

ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AR-SILC)

Katy Morris reported that Sha Stephens had to attend another meeting, but asked that the group be reminded of the Cross-Disability Conference and Day at the Capitol scheduled for October 16-19th. It centers at the Holiday Inn Airport Conference Center on Bankhead Drive. People are coming in from around the state and Sha encourages everyone to turn out. The SILC report is in the board packet. We will follow up and make sure everyone is aware of it and post it on the web.

OIB Contract Report

Ms. Sharon Giovinazzo gave the OIB report for the *state fiscal year ending June 30*. The DSB funding expectation is set for WSB to successfully rehabilitate and close 9 cases per month, but WSB does significantly more than that. Most recently, WSB billed for ninety six people, but saw another 290 ‘in-kind’. Even when we close a case, that does not end our involvement because people are still blind and visually impaired and they still need services and support. One of the things that we see most is people who struggle with *adjustment to vision loss*. WSB holds events throughout the state and covers all sectors. We have one coming up in Wynne this month and we already have thirty two people who are signed up for that so we are really excited about that. We have a partnership in each one of the sectors. We have a partnership with a local *Area Agency on Aging* that gives us meeting space and also helps us recruit for those events. Some of the events include our *Healthy Habits, Technology or just socialization*. For example, here in Little Rock we had a game day and we duplicate that in other areas as well. In our healthy habits program, *Doctor Bain* often comes in and provides consultation for participants. Another thing that Doctor Bain does is *donate approximately \$10K dollars a month in medications* for OIB participants.

WSB has also been able to bring in an *additional eye clinic* that bills at the Medicaid rate. It is always exciting when we bring in new partners. One of those partners is **Barbara Kemp**, who came back as a volunteer the same month she retired. Barbara is back to providing orientation

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and mobility (O & M) services for some of our OIB clientele as well as VR. The O & M services are not limited to the center in Little Rock. We can provide ***O & M throughout the state***. We have on-site contractors or we can travel to clients. So if you know someone who just needs some intensive O & M training in their neighborhood and their home, you can contact WSB.

The new ***OIB Specialist*** is really focusing on environmental issues, ***particularly trip hazards***. This is a trend that is being identified in the OIB program across the U.S. WSB staff are going out there assessing the environmental factors and making the OIB client home a safer place. It could be loose area rugs, or paths that are narrowing because none of us want to get rid of anything. Even OIB social events are not just a social time, but ***another point of contact***. We use the events to observe and ensure that everybody is staying healthy. In one instance, the OIB clients are making ***60 to 75 quilts*** for Arkansas Children's hospital. This demonstrates both that they have a valuable skill and that they choose to give back to the community.

We also have opportunities for ***OIB Program volunteers***. Individuals can be vetted through a screening process and background check by applying to Charlie Cain of the Division of Services for the Blind. They can also ***fill out an application*** or contact us at WSB and we can initiate that process and point you in the right direction. Contact Shelly Atkins who serves as a kind of gatekeeper for the OIB volunteer intake. Shelly can be reached at 501-664-7100 extension 233 or via email at satkins@wsb.org or go to the WSB website.

World Services for the Blind. Ms. Giovinazzo gave a detailed report on other WSB activities, noting, among others, the new Credit Counseling Vocational Program, including its online component, a promising alliance with Apple for developing an accessible curriculum for the Apple call center training and a donation received in excess of \$520K from the living trust of ***Cecil A. and Mabel J Smith of Little Rock.***

FAIRS Quarterly Report on Consumer Utilization of AIRS, Including Newslines

FAIRS Secretary Donna Walker reported that she did not personally have access to the report of consumer utilization of AIRS, including Newslines. Katy Morris noted that DSB would distribute the information for the record. Mrs. Walker reminded those assembled that FAIRS President, Ben Fry, had passed away unexpectedly in March. She further reported that AIRS manager Shawn Smith had recently expressed the intention to retire sometime in the not too distant future.

Shawn and AETN representative Mike McCullars told FAIRS members in the last quarterly meeting that AETN has decided to stream 24 hour children's programming on the subcarrier that it currently uses to broadcast AIRS programming, leaving AIRS without a carrier. As an alternative, AETN looked at developing an App for an alternate way that people can access the streaming. It is available now online on a windows PC or Ipad. Android access is unknown. Cable access through the various companies has been spotty and Dish and Direct are not interested at all.

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Dish and Direct are absolutely not interested. Mr. McCullars is working on Comcast participation and AETN has even offered to assist with the purchase of the equipment that Comcast would need, but no Comcast representative will return his call. FAIRS is still trying to distribute information about AIRS and NEWSLINE. The Arkansas Lions Magazine finally published the article about AIRS so maybe that will help with name recognition.

Annual Election of Board Vice-Chair & Secretary

Bill Johnson was re-elected Vice-Chairman of the DSB Board through September 2017, and Sandra Edwards was re-elected Secretary through September 2017. The Board voted by acclamation. **Motion Passed.**

CONSUMER INPUT:

American Council of the Blind (ACB) – Sandy Edwards reported that ACB is going through some troubles right now, having lost two long-time members, since the last board meeting; Imogene Johnson passed away April 25 and Susan Weatherford died in June. Imogene was supposed to have been recognized at the state convention but she was unable to be there so someone took the award to her the Sunday after the convention and she was very appreciative. Imogene passed the next day. Susan Weatherford had undergone lung cancer surgery but had secondary health issues. It was very sudden. ACB needs members. If you know a blind person out there that is looking for a group to join, point them to us.....Our next state convention is going to be in Fayetteville in April at the Garden Inn. I don't know the details yet.

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) - Terry Sheeler shared that the NFB state convention is slated for October 28-30 in Hot Springs. We are working on finalizing the agenda, and plan to use kind of a mix of speakers and do some hands-on things.....experimental things.....like a hands-on crockpot class. We are trying to secure a speaker from the Secretary of State's office to talk about accessible voting, and they said they may be able to bring a machine. The National Representative this year is Carla McQuillin from Oregon.

Annual Evaluation of DSB Director:

Board Recessed. The full Board adjourned to Executive Session to consider the Annual Evaluation of DSB Director Katy Morris.

Board Reconvened. Chairman Sheeler reconvened the full board and reported that it had considered the evaluation of DSB Director Katy Morris.

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SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – December 9, 2016, at 10:00 a.m. Location TBD. 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. followed by the Recognition Celebration of the:

- DSB Consumer of the Year local area winners and statewide winner.
- DSB Employee of the Year categorical winners and overall winner.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards
Secretary