

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

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

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

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron
James Caton
Sharon Giovinazzo
Larry Wayland

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

ASB Representative (Vacant)

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

James Gatewood
Lisa Reynolds

DHS Representative: Keesa Smith

Attorney General's Office Representative: Sara Farris

DSB Staff: Rhonda Austin, Charlie Cain-Davis, Kandy Cayce, Mary Douglas, Brent Dozier, Lisa Fore, Rhonda Garmon, Linda Haynes, Runar Jensen, Christy Lamas, Ester Lunnie, Katy Morris, Debra Newton, Stacye Nichols, Jim Pearson, Kena Sabb, Brian Sanders, Lou Talley, Coral Virden, Liz Whitaker. Also in attendance, the remainder of DSB Staff present for statewide meeting.

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

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

APPROVAL OF 09-09-2016 MINUTES. Motion was made by Mr. Bill Johnson to approve the September 9, 2016 minutes. Keith Clark seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Katy Morris

Many of us had the opportunity earlier to hear motivational speaker, Paul Vitale. Mr. Vitale made many points in his presentation that resonated in our discussions at statewide meeting in the last few days, but his question that kept coming back to me was “do you believe in miracles?” I look at the faces in this room, and realize, obviously, we all do.

Let me begin by thanking everyone for your attendance. Also, I want to take a moment to publicly thank the staff; particularly Cassondra, Christy Lamas, and Rhonda Garmon for handling things so flawlessly while I was out recently with my husband who was in Intensive Care.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES:

Americus Treaty – I normally organize my DSB Director’s Report along the lines of National, State and DSB. Today I need to add International. I don’t know if you are familiar with the World Blind Union, but the consultant who works with me on the Executive Committee of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, Dr. Fred Schroeder, was recently elected President of the World Blind Union. I believe Dr. Schroeder is also the first or second vice-president of the National Federation of the Blind. I get invaluable global information chiefly from two or three sources, all of which Fred touches. One of the things that he has been talking about for the last several years is the Americus Treaty, which has to do with the access that people who are blind across the world have to books. We take it somewhat for granted in the United States, that books are at least available, but what I didn’t realize is only 1%-7% of the books that the people in the United States have available to them are actually accessible to these other countries. The very idea of being denied access to sometimes 99% of the books ever published. It is understandable that they refer to it as “the World Book Famine”.

NATIONAL ISSUES:

Medicaid Expansion –In 2013, the uninsured made up 16.6 percent of the U.S. population. It is valuable to note that this statistic hit a low of 10 percent not very long ago. I want to call your attention to a recent Kaiser Foundation report on the uninsured to follow this as we go forward, and track how we continue to serve our constituents, since DSB does wrap-around services with Medicaid.

Atticus Brief – Another thing I want to bring to your attention is the Atticus Brief to the Supreme Court on IDEA that was filed by 118 members of Congress. It’s called the Endrew F. versus Douglas County School District and perhaps Mr. Caton and some of the other folks in the room may be able to give more details, but basically it has to do with whether school districts are providing substantial educational services to persons with disabilities. This plays into so much with WIOA and the provision of Pre-employment Transition Services, that it has tremendous implications for DSB and the people we serve. We will be following this for sure.

Continuing Resolution – You may have read that Congress did pass a Continuing Resolution that did move the federal budget forward and provided that the federal government can continue to operate at least until April 28th.

National Employment Team – I also want to note that the National Employment Team (NET), a group of major companies that have stepped up to the bar to create ways to profitably recruit and employ persons with disabilities. Brian Sanders has been very involved in working with the counselors to get our clients' resumes set up with the NET. Though Arkansas is just beginning with the NET and the Talent Acquisition Portal in which client resumes are stored, a few other states are already making progress on this.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind – DSB Deputy Director Cassondra Williams and Field Administrator Christy Lamas attended CSAVR recently and Cassondra stayed for NCSAB as well.

Employer Engagement - The prime focus of the CSAVR and NCSAB agendas was Employer Engagement, because that is the focus of the WIOA act and the combined state plan that governs all the partner agencies. To engage the employer, DSB must begin with what it is the employer is seeking in the way of employee education and skills, and you don't just look at employers within the geographic boundaries of Arkansas. You look at what is over your border.... look at industry sectors, such as aerospace or food processing like Tysons.

Elimination of Homemakers – Various agencies and organizations have come together to bring the concerns of the Older Blind and their supporters to the attention of Congress. Under WIOA, Homemakers are no longer recognized as a successful rehabilitation because homemaking is not competitive, integrated employment. I understand the financial logic of that to Congress, but when homemakers cannot get the independent living skills training and equipment they have previously received through DSB, that dependency has a financial repercussion as well. This repercussion will become even more evident as baby boomers, like myself, swell the population in the coming years and those with vision problems need homemaking skills to remain independent.

Randolph Sheppard – Another agenda item of particular interest at NCSAB was Randolph-Sheppard vending. In other states, the state licensing agencies, like DSB, deal frequently with the Department of Defense and their various regulations that create barriers for the establishment of Randolph Sheppard facilities. In addition to DoD, federal General Services Administration (GSA) contracting also presents impediments to Randolph-Sheppard vending. In central Arkansas, I recently signed a five-year waiver, for the second time, for the VFP location in the basement of the federal building in downtown Little Rock. DSB was still unable to interest a licensed blind vendor in operating the location. Red tape, security issues, traffic flow and product and service competition in the immediate area made the location unprofitable. This is the second five-year waiver I have had to authorize because the location with all its rules is just too complicated. VFP Administrator Jim Pearson is always searching for locations that might be viable, but they have to offer a certain amount of traffic in order to promise reasonable profit.

Licensed Blind Vendors are private entrepreneurs. They don't work for DSB. They work for themselves.

STATE ISSUES:

Legislative Session – The 2017 legislative session will start the second week in January. I think 2017 or possibly 2019 will see some sort of legislation that will bring DSB and Arkansas closer to the intent of the Workforce Innovations Opportunities Act. I expect the Arkansas legislation will mirror what is in effect in Texas. The Texas law does away with the Texas Commission for the Blind, folding it into the general agency, and draws the general agency closer to all the partners in WIOA. The Texas legislation provides for the gradual merger over a three year period. Like Texas, I fully expect that the Arkansas legislation would set a future plan rather than move suddenly, because there are too many things that have to be put in place sequentially to hope to achieve a positive outcome.

WIOA – DSB staff are involved in working on the State Workforce Board Strategic Planning committee. Basically, what the Committee is doing at this stage is implementing the regulations that finally came about August 19, after the Act was signed July 22, 2014. The various federal agencies are still getting the regulations of IDEA synced with the other regulations.

Governor's Employment First Task Force – Come December 20 we will reconvene the Governor's Employment First Task Force. The goal is to increase the number of state employees who are significantly disabled. I know you have been listening to me talk about this initiative for at least three years now. The state employee piece is paused while other teams polish the plan on supported employment and a portion of that has to do with clarifying the funding for it.

State Budget – The state budget submitted to the Legislative Council by the Governor is a conservative one. The Governor is seeking to downsize state government through attrition and other cost-saving measures. Staff are understandably concerned with proposed changes to the pay plan, because it has not yet been released for analysis on how it will impact them individually. The other thing that is of concern to all employers and to the state budget is the impact of changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act. The pay plan was developed with the FLSA changes in mind, but that has now been delayed indefinitely pending outcome of the Texas Court case.

DSB ISSUES:

Relocation – One big concern for DSB staff is the details of any pending colocation with Workforce. Based on the WIOA act, I expect that this will eventually come about, but the topic is still in the early planning stages. They'll need to consider the organizational design of each collocated office, including VR and their support staff. I don't anticipate a reduction in the number of DSB physical offices. I do expect a move toward more frequent virtual operations, which is exciting for a lot of staff who spend a lot of time commuting from their homes to an office. We are seeing a great many more states moving in this direction.

Business and Technology Report – Jim Pearson, Administrator

Agency Computer Systems. The DHS Office of Systems and Technology has finally gotten a ‘ghost’ program ready to set-up our new computers, with priority going to our laptops.

Vending Facility Program (VFP). As Katy mentioned, she did reissue a waiver to GSA for the cafeteria down in the basement of the Little Rock federal building. We solicited bids from vendors and received none. The VFP still maintains the permit for the other location in the federal building on the first floor. That location has a lot more accessibility for customers. For VFP, when you have contracts with the government and experience certain issues, there is no room for negotiation. For Vending Managers, it’s unfortunate that when they, as independent entrepreneurs, are trying to make their own business decisions for profitability, but a government entity, such as GSA, is telling them what they can and cannot sell....can and cannot do..... and how they can and cannot price their products. GSA let a public bid for the same location (unsuccessfully) about five years ago. They ended up granting a permit to a couple of individuals, instead of developing a contract. To my understanding, the permitted operations only lasted three to six months. The location has been closed for about two years.

Highway Vending Locations. VFP was hoping to get the rest stop facilities open for Christmas. The Highway Department reports that renovation is ahead of schedule, but not far enough ahead to open for Christmas. We are looking for those facilities to come back on line probably between March and June, depending on how contracts go. The renovated locations will be real nice stone facilities. We have our machines in place for contracts we just awarded in October. One contractor out of Forrest City changed, the rest of them stayed the same, as did our percentages. However, the closed facilities brought our sales down about 60 percent, since the three closed facilities make up the bulk of highway sales in Arkansas. We are expecting to get fully operational within the next three to six months and have a good relationship with the Highway Department and Parks and Tourism. Highway vending revenue is expected to stay about the same.

VFP has a new Specialist, Ernest Hart. Ernest came on board in November, after having worked for the program in the same capacity for a few months sometime back. He has visited some facilities already. One location we are looking at is the Arkansas Career Training Institute in Hot Springs (formerly the Old Rehab hospital). We are hoping to open that facility, probably sometime late January or first of February.

Agency Inventory. Statewide inventories were done and results accepted. There were no issues. Thanks to Debra Newton and Jimmy McCune for their help.

Volunteer Services. DSB has increased the reporting of its use of volunteer services. I think we have always been receiving the volunteer services, but we are now tracking it better.

AWARE Client Data System. DSB has just approved an AWARE update for our client database and a contract process as well. We should be ready to go on all of our agency issues. Everything is going smooth right now.

End of Business and Technology Report.

Operations Report – Cassandra Williams, DSB Assistant Director

Financial Status. DSB Assistant Director Cassandra Williams reported that DSB has been working on the federal fiscal year closeout and referred the board to the financial reports that are in board packets today. Close out reports are due December 31, so we are looking forward to getting all of that wrapped up. DSB Chief Financial Officer, Jimmy McCune, resigned in November to take a similar position with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. He deserves applause because he really left us in a great position for reporting. He did a lot of work before he left and I really appreciate that. We are working on the Faith Based Bridge contract to get that signed, and should see that out for bid sometime in January or February.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank the board members for being so flexible during this training, and thank you for your attendance here today.

End of DSB Operations Report.

Field Services Report – Field Administrator Christy Lamas

Performance Measures. In respect for our tight timeframe, I will be brief. Field Services is working right now throughout the state on performance measures. Our area managers are here today including: Ms. Lou Talley, Ms. Mary Douglas, Ms. Amanda Connell, and Mr. Brian Sanders. Everybody in Field Services takes part in what we do and how we do it. We are holding discussions on how to get things done, when to get things done, and what it is going to take to comply with the reporting regulations of the Department of Labor (DOL). DSB Statistician Crystal Anderson is helping us customize data collection on Supportive Employment, Section 511, and Pre-Employment Transition services, so we can track that correctly. DOL reporting is not just a duplication of the VR reporting available in our AWARE client data system.

Shared Goal. WIOA is about achieving competitive, integrated employment for everyone. DSB is focused on the same goal, for the special population we serve.

End of DSB Field Report

End of Director's Report

The Board Chair thanked staff for their reports and expressed particular appreciation to Cassandra and Christy for their labor in setting up and providing yesterday's Board Training.

OLD BUSINESS:

Consumer Group Assistance in Recruiting Qualified Applicants

Katy Morris noted that the purpose of the agenda item is to report upon the outcome of DSB's specific recruitment efforts through NFB and ACB in the last year. She reported that during the 12 month period DSB notified NFB and ACB of every vacancy and recruitment that occurred. During the year, the agency received a total of three job applications from qualified consumers. The agency hired two of the individuals and made an offer to the third, but was turned down because he had a better offer.....which is a good thing.

Terry Sheeler reported for NFB, that whenever she gets notice of DSB job openings, usually from Cassandra, we try to send that along to anyone that we know that might be qualified for the job. Anything that I get I send it on to my email master list.

Sandra Edwards reported for ACB that she had not done that much because she did not know of anyone who would be qualified or interested in the positions. She added that consumer interest may be changing, so we will see what happens next year.

Terry added that both of the consumer groups are trying to work with DSB to make sure potentially qualified applicants are actually submitting their applications. I have not kept a total list of all that I have referred, but I try to push that information out anywhere that I can to anybody that may be interested or qualified. When we have someone to refer, we can definitely get you their information, so it can be on top and on hand.

Improvement of DSB Website

Katy Morris reported that most of the DSB website has been updated since last meeting, using both the list provided by Terry Sheeler and researching each link. DSB is still working with support groups to obtain updated information. Since support groups are private entities, there is no mandate to keep their information updated, but responsible staff will check periodically to try to ensure the information is current.

NEW BUSINESS:

Recurring Support Group Opportunities

One support group that is not private meets at the Little Rock DSB Tech Lab on Mondays. We are looking at establishing the same sort of routine event in the other four regions around the state.

Initially, the DSB support group meetings may occur once a month until we determine whether there's demand for them to meet more frequently. At first we may find little attendance other than DSB staff, but staff will be there for the announced time period so that our constituents know they can depend on it.

Production of Separate DSB Annual Report

One of the issues that was raised last meeting was that it was difficult to locate the on-line version of the DSB Annual Report. It should be noted that the DSB Annual report has been part of the DHS Annual Statistical Report for decades. To help in locating the documents, we will duplicate the report links both on the DHS site and the DSB site.

Future OIB Satisfaction Surveys

Historically, DSB had conducted its OIB and VR Client Satisfaction Surveys in-house, but outside of Field Services, and reported their results to the DSB Board and the Public. In 2010, Mississippi State University asked DSB to join its nationwide assessment of OIB services, and DSB accepted. However, MSU has attracted so much business related to the new act, that it must close its OIB activities to concentrate on VR. So DSB will return to conducting its own OIB Client Satisfaction Surveys, as it does for VR.

The Minnesota OIB Initiative

I was on a teleconference with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind Tuesday and it was mentioned that Minnesota had received a million-dollar increase in state revenue for the OIB program. Minnesota has a comparatively high concentration of residents, age 55 and older, who are blind or severely visually impaired. I will follow up with the Director for Blind Services in Minnesota to find out how Arkansas might be able to replicate this success.

QUARTERLY REPORTS:

DISABILITY RIGHTS ARKANSAS (DRA)

Disability Rights Arkansas administers a program called the Client Assistance Program which helps with issues of discrimination. If a client of DSB is having communication problems with someone or if there is a conflict with what the client thought they were going to receive but didn't, you can refer them to Disability Rights and we can act as mediator, a third party, to try and help the situation. If you have a client who is experiencing discrimination in housing, employment, education, or post-secondary education and accommodations that they might not be receiving, we can help. I would encourage you to contact us for any issue of discrimination.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AR-SILC)

Sha Stephens reported the SILC Board has four positions that will be vacant in February and it is soliciting board applications now. The terms of SILC Board Chair Adren Duncan and Vice-chair Robert Fagan expire in another year, and the SILC particularly wants to continue to have representation from the blind and low vision community. The SILC's 22nd anniversary was November 22, and the organization will have an anniversary mixer to celebrate on December 21. The winner of the Phil Stinebuck Courage Award will be announced. Phil was one of the original charter board members and the award recognizes an individual who has overcome barriers and advanced the cause of Independent Living. I will send Mrs. Katy the link for nominations. You all are invited to stop in on December 21st from 11:00 to 1:00. If you think you will attend, please call and let us know by December 16th, so we can include you in the plans for the light lunch that we are going to serve. Nominees that are not selected this year will be considered for the award next year.

A couple of months ago I reported that I am on the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) 'Voting' sub-committee. The committee is working on goals and objectives to help with future nationwide elections. The committee recommends that each state establish an ADA Advisory Panel to work with the respective Secretary of State to address voting access compliance. As this evolves, I will keep you updated. On a related matter, SILC has a new reporting system for our Independent Living '704' report. We demoed the system recently and ARS, DSB and the SILC are awaiting word from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living on when the actual training will take place for everyone else.

WORKFORCE CENTER UTILIZATION REPORT

Christy Lamas reported that all of the kiosks in Workforce Centers around the state are being upgraded by DSB. Mr. Jim Pearson and his Tech Lab Team, are going to the centers and making sure that each kiosk has an updated computer and software, so our consumers can independently access job information.

FAIRS Quarterly Report on Consumer Utilization of AIRS, Including Newslines

Larry Wayland, President of the Board of Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS), gave a report on FAIRS. At the meeting in November, the FAIRS board elected Larry Wayland as President, Dr. Larry Dickerson as Vice-President, Donna Walker as Secretary, and Jimmy Sparks as treasurer. NEWSLINE can be accessed by telephone or reading devices like the Victor Stream reader or a NEWSLINE App on the iPhone. You can access broadcasts with a computer or iPhone, and that is a continuous broadcast. Some 350 newspapers and magazines are read. We want the counselors to encourage clients to sign up for NEWSLINE and utilize it. The service also has job listings.

Shawn Smith reported in the last FAIRS Board meeting that we had about 2,000 users on both the broadcast and the website and that is pretty good. We are not sure how many listeners are listening to the NEWSLINE. We found 72 people that were utilizing NEWSLINE. Of the people we contacted that said that they were using NEWSLINE, they were very happy with the service and sure wanted it to continue. We know that there are a lot more people out there that could be utilizing the NEWSLINE service, so we would appreciate it if you would encourage anyone you know who is eligible to sign up. I know the DSB Tech Staff will assist, but Donna and I definitely would be happy to help people utilize that service if somebody needs the help.

CONSUMER INPUT:

ACB. Sandy Edwards reported that ACB state convention will be April 21-22 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fayetteville. We are going to have a side trip to the Crystal Bridges Museum and that should be a fun time. The ACB national convention will be in Reno, Nevada next summer.

NFB. Terry Sheeler reported that Tevin Bailey of Lonoke attended the NFB Convention in Florida last year. He is an individual who is legally blind. Tevin is a DSB client and has been named to the marching band at Arkansas State University. He is on the drumline. Tevin also previously attended Louisiana Center for the Blind in Ruston, Louisiana. NFB has just completed the 2016 state convention and plans for next year will be announced later. The national convention will take place the second week in July 2017, in Orlando, Florida. It will be in the same location in 2018.

SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – March 10, 2017, at 1:00 p.m. Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, First Floor, Conference Room A.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards
Secretary