

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Keith Clark, At-Large
Sandra Edwards, ACB
Erika Evans, At-Large
Bill Johnson, AER
Basil Julian, Lions
Terry Sheeler, NFB

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron, BVA
James Caton, ASBVI
Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB
Lisa Reynolds, AER
Larry Wayland, FAIRS

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

ASBVI Representative (Vacant)

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

James Gatewood, Vendors

DHS Representative: None

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff: Yolanda Allen, April Anderson, Crystal Anderson, Rhonda Austin, Amanda Connell, Charlie Cain-Davis, Kandy Cayce, Mary Douglas, Lisa Fore, Rhonda Garmon, Ernest Hart, Linda Haynes, Linnea Heintz, Kyle Kiper, Katy Morris, Debra Newton, Stacye Nichols, Jim Pearson, Kena Sabb, Brian Sanders, Lou Talley, Coral Virden, Henry Washington, Cassandra Williams, 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 12-09-2016 MINUTES. Motion was made by Mr. Keith Clark to approve the December 9, 2016 minutes. Basil Julian seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Katy Morris

At the December meeting, I talked about expected vacancies we would be facing between then and July 1. We knew we would lose Feona Barnett, our long-time database Administrator to retirement. Add to this Field Chief Christy Lamas, who promoted to ARS and East Arkansas Area Supervisor Runar Jensen who returned to Tennessee as a private provider. Jump Start

Coordinator Ebony Kelly also promoted to Pulaski Tech, and West Memphis CRC Karsten Everett took a position with the VA. Amid the loss of all this talent, I've got to give a shout out to the many DSB staff members who have shouldered the work of so many vacancies and tried to help us through this difficult time when the legislature is in session and so many WIOA activities are ongoing. South Arkansas Area Supervisor Lou Talley has helped tremendously with the field program. With both the East Arkansas Supervisor and the State Field Administrator being vacant, Lou has been doing double time...actually triple time. Thank you, Lou. Stephanie Hettinger and Crystal Anderson have also stepped in to handle the database load from Feona. All of these positions either are or will be under immediate recruitment. This is managed by Cassondra.

NATIONAL ISSUES:

Federal Hiring Freeze – With the new administration, VR nationwide has seen a series of executive orders that has had significant impact. In Arkansas, the executive order freezing federal hiring has strongly affected World Services for the Blind (WSB) in its IRS training program. Traditionally, the IRS program guaranteed good jobs for consumers able to complete the training. Now those jobs have been frozen and the training program put on hold. I will let Sharon give the details on that later.

Pre-ETS Age Limits – The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations came out last August. One of the regulations ties the beginning age for DSB pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to the age used by the state Department of Education, which is age 16. Prior to WIOA, DSB has provided transition services beginning at age 14. We can still serve these younger consumers, but must assign VR counselors to do so, and then transfer the students case to Pre-ETS counselors when they turn 16 through their high school graduation. Then the student must be transferred back to the VR counselor for further services. The National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) has petitioned Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos for reconsideration of this RSA rule. This petition is made possible by another executive order where President Trump charged all federal agencies to analyze and recommend elimination of regulations that significantly impede employment. The Pre-ETS regulations also contains a very narrow group of services, and NCSAB seeks a broader range of services to be more freely provided by the Pre-ETs counselors, as transition was under VR.

Homemakers – NCSAB is also pursuing reconsideration of the elimination of Homemaker as a valid employment outcome. Though it is neither competitive nor integrated, it is an important and necessary job. However, this will likely require a change in the law.

Convenings – In Arkansas the WIOA partner agencies have been meeting since 2014. However, federal agencies have recently held “convenings” to support dialogue between partners. Arkansas reps were surprised to find that many partners in other states had yet to meet each other until attending the convening.

Vending – NCSAB is concerned about an executive order that might affect those states that have strong Randolph Sheppard locations that produce high-dollar incomes for licensed blind vendors. President Trump recently spoke about the need to have a public and private partnership in order to be able to afford infrastructure improvements. To us that translates into concerns about what is going to happen to highway vending locations in Arkansas and across the nation. We are expecting that to come down to a battle if they try to displace the vendors. It would eliminate the current source of the DSB vendor retirement program, their associated benefits, and such.

Reviews – Recently RSA released the notice of states with upcoming federal reviews, and Arkansas wasn't included, so for all of the stakeholders that would have been pulled into that process as I reported to the board earlier in the year, you can actually plan your summer vacations without fear of being interrupted by a meeting or teleconference.

Older Blind – Next month I will attend the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind Spring Conferences. I will accompany Massachusetts Commissioner Paul Sanger and representatives of American Foundation for the Blind in approaching Congressional leaders in the area of disability and aging. We will discuss the critical need for modifying the formula to increase funding for services to Older Blind persons. The group has good statistics in support of our petition, so we will see where we get with that.

STATE ISSUES:

WIOA Agreements – We are moving forward with the development of the mandatory cooperative agreements required under WIOA. Some states are ahead of us in this regard. Even though we have members of some groups appointed to the DSB Board, we will still need cooperative agreements with those same groups. The combined state plan regards ARS and DSB as one entity (VR). So, in some instances, we may develop one agreement, but keep ARS and DSB separately identified. This is especially likely with the WIOA partners, such as dislocated workers, youth workers, adult education, and DWS employment services.

Outreach in the Medical Environment– LaTasha Mays, a pre-Employment Transition counselor out of the Pine Bluff office under Mary Douglas, has suggested we set up regular itinerant points in various hospitals and clinics and work with them to connect families with our services. We would start with the clinic at Arkansas Children's Hospital. If it works for ACH, then we would expand into UAMS and other hospitals and clinics.

Legislative Session – HB1289 regards DHS Reorganization, but contains the same language used in Act 481 of 1983, which established DSB, and preserves the governing board and DSB structure unchanged.

DSB's Appropriation Bill SB199 has not yet passed, but neither have most of the other DHS bills. Pay Plan Act 365 contains errors placing our five area supervisors at different pay grades, so obviously that is not right, since they all have similar (though geographically separate) territories and identical credentialing requirements and functional job descriptions.

DSB ISSUES:

Competitive, Integrated Employment – WIOA Regulations require DSB to place clients into competitive, integrated employment. This negates previous placement opportunities that offered good wages and benefits, unless those environments also employ a 51% non-disabled workforce.

Transition – VR and Pre-Employment Transition Counselors are redoubling their outreach efforts. This is particularly important for Pre-ETS, because of the limited number of Counselors and the larger territories. Pre-ETS Counselors are required to become a recognized presence in all the schools. To advance that presence, DSB will develop cooperative agreements with each school. If the principal has signed off on the agreement, Pre-ETS Counselors can carry it with them when approaching school staff members about supporting the Pre-ETS activities in each school and anticipate a positive reception.

Case reviews – DSB has increased the number and depth of its case reviews for multiple reasons including upcoming federal review. If there is something that is not meeting required standards the supervisor will develop a performance improvement plan and then provide training to assist the staff so that the standards can be met.

Workforce – In addition to the State Workforce Development Board, there are 10 local Workforce Boards that interconnect to cover the entire state geographically. On the local boards, just like the state board, the majority of the board members must be employers. DSB is represented by counselors on each board. Board membership gives counselors the opportunity to learn from employers in the local area what skills they look to hire now and in the future. The counselors can then better coach and train clients on how to prepare themselves to compete for those jobs. Important also is the personal relationships that develop by the fact that our counselors are voting members of those local boards. I believe Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Tina Shores, of the DSB Fort Smith Office, is not only still a member, but the Vice-chair of the Western Arkansas Workforce Development Board.

Employment First – The Governor's Employment First Task Force is looking strongly at job retention as one of the targeted outcomes of the initiative. When an employee has been injured or is on extended sick leave, instead of avoiding contact, it's preferred that supervisors routinely connect with the absent staff member to let them know how valuable they are to the organization and to keep them informed. Hopefully, this will result in earlier return to work which is good for the employee, the agency and, ultimately, the state.

Field Services Report – Katy Morris

DSB Field has experienced significant turnover over the last three years. Yet, thanks to so many staff, particularly field supervisors who have shouldered an immense amount of additional labor, services to clients have not seen a significant decrease. Last year at this time, 98 individuals had achieved the goals of their Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) and were working. This year some 109 individuals have been successfully employed during that same time period. Staff are struggling in a very difficult caseload situation and doing amazingly well. Case reviews and field reports show staff do need more training on the changes under WIOA and revised subminimum wage laws. Another area of concern is the related need to update the VR manual. North Arkansas Area Supervisor, Amanda Connell has the lead on this until I can hire a Field Administrator to replace Christy Lamas. The interviews are set and we should be able to get that position filled pretty quickly. Again, thanks goes to an amazing staff.

End of DSB Field Report

Business and Technology Report – Jim Pearson

Legislation – Jim Pearson reported that he has been tracking DSB-related legislation during the session and noted that the deadline for legislators to file bills is March 13.

Vending Facility Program (VFP) – VFP Trainee David Cox will finish his training next week and is scheduled to open a vending location at the Arkansas Career Training Institute in Hot Springs on April 10. Mr. Cox lives near the center and his wife has worked there in the cafeteria for several years, so it promises to be a good fit, a good placement. David operated his own automotive business for thirty plus years before losing his vision. I want to specifically recognize VR Counselor Henry Washington, who is present here. Henry referred David to VFP after searching long and hard in the Hot Springs area to find an individual who would fit in and work well at the ACTI location.

Personnel. Mr. Ernest Hart has returned to VFP as the Vending Program Specialist. Ernest replaced Stacye Nichols, who is present today, but who recently transferred to work in DSB Staff Development under Cassondra Williams. Stacye did an excellent job and Ernest is doing an excellent job as well. He had worked briefly in the same capacity for DSB several years ago and has hit the ground running.

Vo-Tech Consolidation. Until recently, Crowley's Ridge Vo-Tech was the only remaining Vocational Technical School in the state. It has now been consolidated with East Arkansas Community College (EACC), which is immediately adjacent to the Vo-Tech. VFP has a vending facility on the Vo-Tech property, which has been operated by the same manager since 1970. What changes will occur for this location due to the school consolidation is not yet known. EACC does not operate a food service, but they do have a vending contract. VFP has provided

food service at the Crowley's Ridge property for decades and we hope to continue. Currently, a 1998 state law says that once a Vo-Tech becomes part of a university or college, the consolidated school is exempt from the VFP priority to operate a vending location in certain circumstances. We hope we can develop some type of joint venture or partnership with EACC and keep the VFP location going. We've done that at Pulaski Tech when they became part of the U of A system about two months ago.

VFP on the National Scene. I attended the annual Randolph-Sheppard Vendors of America (RSVA) meeting in Las Vegas recently where major trends were discussed. The average age of vending program participants is 55 plus nationwide. Younger clients are not showing interest in the Vending Program, but lean more toward the computer careers targeted in the schools. VFP careers are sought more by seasoned individuals looking for a small business opportunity. Several states mentioned that they have locations that had to be combined or annexed with another facility, because they couldn't get managers.

Highway Locations. DSB renewed a three-year contract with the Highway Commission to keep our facilities and our third party vending services on the highway system, so we are good until 2019. The Highway Department is finishing renovations, and we are to open facilities at White River, Russellville and Social Hill in the next 60 days. We should get our commissions and sales back up to par. We have a good partnership with the Highway Department. There is a concern about privatization as Katy mentioned; there is a big opportunity for everything from food to fuel and possibly lodging, and it is big money. Millions of dollars go through those facilities that are established on the private areas. In Oklahoma, the Cherokee nation has made toll roads and put in these types of facilities. Some of my cohorts in Oklahoma said the money that goes through those facilities is in the billions of dollars, because they also get a share of the toll road fees.

Vendor Training. There is a national push to consolidate training, testing, and licensing for vending managers in the Randolph-Sheppard program. The Hadley Institute has developed a curriculum for that. This was a big topic at the RSVA meeting, and we are looking at this development. At my table at the RSVA meeting, I met a programmer who has sent me several thousand dollars' worth of software for free, because I use Turbo Tax and we were talking about trying to make an accessible format for some of the Intuit QuickBooks for Turbo Tax. Intuit is in the process of doing that, and he sent me some beta testing software. I cannot download it onto the state system at work, but I'm working on it at home. This would be beneficial for managers in the Randolph-Sheppard program.

Technology – Gustavo Manzanales attended the California State University at Northridge (C-SUN) Assistive Technology Conference. Presenters shared knowledge and best practices about accessible software and hardware and all types of technology solutions for people who are blind or visually impaired, including voice activated systems.

Gustavo reported back to Liz and me about updates and training on the Echo Amazon Series. They are also looking at Smart TV functions and tying them all together. This will help us update the training in the tech lab.

End of Business and Technology Report.

Operations Report – Cassandra Williams-Stokes, DSB Assistant Director

Expenditures – Finance, field and other staff have really worked hard to complete the transactions that will utilize all available state revenue for this fiscal year. I am really pleased to say that DSB has done an excellent job. We are on target. Our next big effort financially will be to close out state fiscal year 2017. The expenditure budget report is provided in your packet and covers the period July 1 through December 31, 2016. If you have any questions about that, feel free to email me or speak with me after the meeting.

Contracts – We are working to finalize the requests for invitation for our minority outreach contracts. We plan for the contracts to begin on July 1. If we run into any issues with legislative approval or procurement through DHS, then the begin date will be later. We may have that out within the next 30 days for bid. All of the existing contracts that are being renewed are on target to begin July 1, with legislative approval.

Recruitment – Our Field Administrator position is vacant. Our CFO position is awaiting background checks before we can move forward and set a hire date. Positions for the Area Supervisor of the West Memphis/Jonesboro office and the Quality Assurance Coordinator are being advertised. We have several vacant rehab counselor positions (including a Transition Counselor for the Little Rock area) that have been advertised. As requested, Mrs. Sheeler and Ms. Edwards receive the job announcements to share with their respective consumer groups.

Maintenance of Effort (MOE) – One of the reasons why we watch our state general revenue so closely is to make sure we don't overmatch VR federal funds. For the current year, DSB is required to provide state match at the same rate as we did two years previously. This is termed 'Maintenance of Effort (MOE)'. We have to manage how we allot state general revenue to staff and how we expend those funds during the year. We expend our state general revenue October 1 through the end of June 30, to make sure that we don't overly match. Another thing we watch closely is our state match for the other programs, like OIB and Independent Living. We have to make sure that we fully match those as well. Indirect costs are also tracked. The indirect rate is set in the DHS cost allocation plan, which DHS is currently in the process of updating. Thanks to our staff again. They work really hard. Our staff has really stepped up, even though, for many, it is not in their job description to do a lot of these things. They have really been willing to keep us moving even with the vacancies that we have, and I just want to thank them for that.

End of DSB Operations Report.

End of Director's Report

OLD BUSINESS:

Board Vacancies – Terry Sheeler

Not only do we have vacancies in the staff, but also we have vacancies that will be coming up on the board in 2018 state fiscal year. Bill Johnson, Basil Julian, and I are all up for reappointment, and Sandy Edwards, the board secretary, has served the maximum terms allowed and will roll off the board. This means we will need appointment of a new board member and election of a new Board Secretary. We've been trying to get the ASBVI voting position filled for some time. When Mr. Caton was appointed ASBVI superintendent, effective July 1, 2016, he automatically vacated the voting position. It is time for the board to contact the Governor to bring his attention to all of this. Sandy Edwards will continue in her position until the Governor names a replacement. We will try to keep everyone informed. The Governor's appointment process is automated, so if you are eligible and seeking reappointment, you probably want to go in and tag that base, so they will know that you are interested in reappointment. The DSB Director will send some information to the Board members on how to do this.

Review of Current Committee Assignments – Terry Sheeler

The Board Chairman gave a report on the current committees that have been assigned for the record. Some of these assignments will need to be adjusted as board members are replaced or otherwise change.

- Legislative Committee – Sandra Edwards, Sharon Giovinazzo (and formerly Jim Hill)
- Budget Committee – Keith Clark, Erika Evans, Teresa Sheeler
- By-Laws Committee – Bill Johnson, Kara Aaron, James Caton
- Employee of the Year (EOY) – Basil Julian, Kara Aaron, James Gatewood
- Consumer of the Year (COY) – Lisa Reynolds, Teresa Sheeler, James Caton
- OIB Committee- Teresa Sheeler, Bill Johnson, Sandra Edwards, Keith Clark

NEW BUSINESS:

FFY 2016 VR Consumer Satisfaction Report – Ms. Crystal Anderson

Crystal Anderson explained the process and reported the results of the FFY 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Report done by DSB. Results presented here will also be posted on the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>

FFY 2016 OIB Consumer Satisfaction Report – Ms. Mary Douglas

Mary Douglas reported on the FFY 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Report done by Mississippi State University. The complete report can also be found on the DSB website link above.

Annual Approval of Board Member Expenses for Participation in Quarterly Meetings, Consumer Conventions, National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils and Agency Operations – Terry Sheeler

As required by state law at the first meeting of each calendar year, Basil Julian made a motion that the DSB Board approve board member reimbursement for the above described meetings. Erika Evans seconded the motion. **Motion Passed.**

Report on NEWSLINE Utilization – Larry Wayland, FAIRS Board President

Non-profit Status – Larry Wayland reported that the Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Services (FAIRS) is in the process of re-establishing its 501(c)3 status. Hopefully, we will regain it by the end of the year. After we get the paperwork filed, it takes about six months for it to be approved. We have hired someone to file it for us, and it shouldn't cost very much. Right now that person does tax preparations and is in the middle of tax season, so we may have to wait until after April 15.

Access – AIRS services are continuing to improve in that they are going to be available on some cable and satellite systems in homes. The way you do that is you go into your TV menus, turn on the SAP setting, and you will be able to locate AIRS from there. DSB is paying an annual fee for NEWSLINE; it is a very good service whereby 350 newspapers and magazines can be read by several methods. I think by telephone is probably the easiest and most accessible method for most people. There are also apps for iPhone and Android phones. I prefer to use the Victor stream reader or my computer. If blind people are going to be a part of society, they are going to have to keep up with news.

Usage – We have not checked the NEWSLINE utilization since the last time I was here. When we did the survey, we weren't able to get in touch with everybody that was listed. We found 72 users by the telephone, but we would like for that to increase. We want DSB supervisors to please encourage the counselors to inform the clients about NEWSLINE and assist them in learning how to access it.

Report on DWS Kiosk Utilization – Jim Pearson

Process – Jim Pearson reported that we started this project in 2007, in 10 DWS offices in cities where we also had DSB offices. The project expanded to 17 facilities, and we provided the equipment and software. As for the 2017 updates, Liz and some of her tech staff will help set up

the systems and train DWS staff on JAWS and MAGic software. DWS had to develop their upgraded ghost/image for the systems, and this was completed right after Christmas, 2016. The log-in sequences, the passwords, maintenance, and upgrades to the system are on the DWS network, not our state DHS DSB system, so there was a delay getting the image together.

Updates – We have completed updates in Texarkana and Monticello. The updates for Russellville and Arkadelphia will occur within the next 10 days. Of the remainder, four are scheduled in April and eight will be scheduled in May. One of the issues we are having is DWS onsite manager vacancies. DWS is in the process of filling those positions.

Utilization – There is probably not a lot of utilization currently, because we just had those two sites set up. Also, in Texarkana, we share a building with Texas. That is kind of an odd situation, but the kiosk is actually located in Texas. If you walk into the building, the left side is Texas and the right side is Arkansas. All the facilities should be up and running the first of May, and we should have some better figures for the next board meeting. We have the kiosks assigned with headsets, so if somebody is reading in a JAWS script it's not blaring all over the whole area. It would have been good to have a room with a door that you could close and use JAWS.

Responsibilities – DWS is paying for the site set up and the upkeep, upgrades and utilities. Basically we have provided the equipment cost only, and it is tracked on our inventory system. We bought the JAWS and MAGic software.

Mobile Unit – DWS has a new mobile unit to meet clients at different sites, and we are working with them on getting some upgrades on software for the mobile unit. Liz Whitaker has been instrumental in that. The DSB Director stated there are 17 kiosk locations now and she believes there are 54 total locations for DWS, so they will probably be looking to us for the future.

QUARTERLY REPORTS:

DISABILITY RIGHTS ARKANSAS (DRA)

Jackie Gordon, DRA Advocate, presented information about DRA services and said in the current federal fiscal year, her agency has served 16 clients who were blind or visually impaired. Their problems included housing, assistive technology, healthcare, abuse, education, employment, rights violations, and program access. The DSB Director inquired whether DSB could follow up with Ms. Gordon to see if DSB could assist in any of these situations. Ms. Gordon said her agency would welcome working with DSB in any way.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AR-SILC)

No representative was present. The report is in the board packet.

CONSUMER INPUT:

ACB. Sandy Edwards reported that the ACB state convention will be April 21-23 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fayetteville. Reservations must be made by the 20th to take advantage of conference room rates, which are \$109 a night. Registration is \$68 and includes the banquet, Saturday lunch, and the registration fee. The ACB national convention will be held in Reno, Nevada June 30-July 7. Erika Evans is going as our alternate delegate. We are looking to increase our membership and also to attract younger members. Our next monthly chapter meeting is tomorrow at Fletcher Library at 11 a.m.

NFB. Terry Sheeler reported that the NFB national convention is July 10-16, in Orlando, Florida. NFB just completed its seminar visits to senators and congressmen in Washington, D.C. Arkansas NFB members Jimmy Sparks, Terry Sheeler and David Henry are shown in the recent Braille Monitor with Congressman French Hill. Additional information is available on the NFB website and in the Braille Monitor. David Henry, our legislative director, is doing follow-up after the Capitol visits. We have discussed doing similar visits in Arkansas, particularly on transportation issues. NFB is looking at having its state convention in October. More information will be reported at the next board meeting.

Bill Johnson cited consumer problems in using guide dogs with Uber, Lift, and taxis and asked what the Board can do as a group to address that. Sandra Edwards recalled successful efforts several years ago when the Board and consumer organizations came together over problems with consumers using guide dogs on state employee association vans. Terry Sheeler said she's attending a meeting March 20th about this issue.

SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – June 9, 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