

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

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

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

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

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

None

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

None

Attorney General's Office Representative: None

Governor's Office Representative: None

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

Others Present: Joseph Baxter, Arkansas Rehab Services Commissioner, Sandy Rowland, VFP manager, and Sandra Edwards, former DSB Board Secretary.

**Motion to Approve the Meeting Agenda**

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

**Motion to Approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting on June 12, 2020**

Bill Johnson moved, and Basil Julian seconded the motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting on June 12, 2020. The motion carried.

**Director's Report**

**DSB Staff Update Since June – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes, Director of the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) provided the Director's report. Dr. Williams-Stokes thanked the DSB Board for their support to the staff and projects implemented by the agency. DSB Staff continues to move forward and provide services to consumers during Covid-19 pandemic. She announced that Dr. Megan Lamb was hired to fill the DSB Field Administrator's position. She thanked Dr. Lamb for her leadership with updating DSB policies and procedures. She also announced that the Quality Assurance (QA) Manager's position was filled by Crystal Anderson who be responsible for tracking DSB compliance with federal and state regulations in accordance with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). Ms. Anderson will also manage the DSB case management database, train the Field staff on WIOA, and work with Assistant Director Betsy Barnes to improve quality assurance practices for the agency.

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

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes provided a report on the DSB budget for the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021. She mentioned that it takes a team effort to implement the services according to the WIOA state plan. The legislative joint biennial budget hearing is scheduled for October 21<sup>st</sup> this year. DSB is still requesting the \$6,391,082 dollars for SFY-22 and SFY-23. There was a small increase in employee benefits charged to each state agency which increased State General revenue by approximately \$28,000. The program budget request was for a total of \$4,646,700 for those state fiscal years.

### **Federal Issues – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

DSB requested a Miscellaneous Federal Grant (MFG) to have the capacity to expend federal funds during SFY 2021. This action was required due to removal of pertinent language from DSB's legislation that allowed the agency to expend federal dollars. New legislation is being proposed for the upcoming session to address the oversight.

### **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Re-allotment Process – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) re-allotment has been finalized. RSA relinquished the funds that were not expended by other states during the required period. DSB applied for and received the \$1,729,062 requested for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. The funds will expire Sept 30, 2022. The funds can be expended in operations or programs that provide services in Vocational Rehabilitation services. DSB will work with Field Staff to make sure these funds are expended timely. DSB applied for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) funds but RSA did not make the funds available to any states. DSB has not received notice of awards for FFY 2021. She thanked the staff and mentioned that, DSB was required to meet the maintenance of effort in order to be eligible for reallotment funds.

**National Issues – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

On a federal level, A virtual monitoring visit from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is scheduled to begin the week of Sep 22<sup>nd</sup> and end in mid-October. DSB has worked with RSA since January to prepare for the meeting. RSA will monitor fiscal and program practices to ensure they align with federal guidelines. More information will be available after the first virtual visit regarding the logistics. DSB staff will be involved in the process.

**Consumer Services – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

Staff are meeting with consumers in the local workforce centers. Gustavo Manzanales' technology report will provide an example of how the visits are structured to ensure COVID safety guidelines are met. Most of the DSB counselors and support staff have returned to working in the office. Those staff were supplied with hand sanitizer, gloves, masks, and cleaning supplies as needed.

**Statewide Meeting – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

The DSB statewide meeting in December would include virtual training for staff this year in lieu of the in-person meeting. The Field Administrator would elaborate on that in her report.

**Consumer Group Meetings – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) conference was scheduled for the second week of December. This time frame conflicts with the Statewide and DSB Board Meeting scheduled the same week in December. The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) scheduled their convention for October 28<sup>th</sup> through October 30<sup>th</sup>. This would be an online conference, and no agenda had been made available at the time of this meeting. One DSB Board member is authorized to participate in the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NSCRC) section of this convention. Dr. Williams-Stokes stated that more information will be shared as it becomes available.

**Assistant Director's Report**

**Financial Report – Betsy Barnes**

Assistant Director Betsy Barnes began by saying that the DSB quarterly financial report is included in the board member packet and offered to answer any questions.

**Rehab Services of Arkansas (RSA) Monitoring – Betsy Barnes**

RSA scheduled their monitoring visit to be conducted virtually. DSB scheduled calls starting Friday 9/18, with a test run. The first official call would be Tuesday 9/22. The second week DSB

would have two calls on Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), followed by two calls on performance. Fiscal management would have two calls and DSB would wrap-up on September 21<sup>st</sup>. DSB staff have provided information and answered questions in the DSB Monitoring and Training Assistance Guide (MTAG) for the audit. This document contained over 120 focus areas.

### **Staff Update Report – Betsy Barnes**

DSB had 54 employed staff or 75% of positions filled. DSB is in position to fill the vacant positions since the state hiring freeze. All new hires must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce. Some vacant positions have been approved and supervisors have moved forward with drug and background checks. Once supervisors receive this information, applicants would be contacted with start dates. Also, supervisors will complete mid-point staff evaluations in October.

### **Quality Assurance (QA) Report – Betsy Barnes**

DSB provided staff training to address Intake and Eligibility. In October staff will cover the case closure process. DSB's AWARE vendor payment process has been revised and written guidance was provided to staff. DSB developed a tracking tool to monitor state plan activities and outcomes. DSB's internal Auditor conducted Case Reviews of Intake, Eligibility and Service. DSB's RSA-911 report for Program Year 2019 4th Quarter has been submitted.

### **Staff Development Report – Betsy Barnes**

DSB continue to receive training updates from the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC), Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), Helen Keller Rehab Center, and online trainings. Staff are working to complete an agenda for statewide training which is scheduled to be held online this year. The DSB Staff Development Coordinator has coordinated and tracked the Comprehensive System of Professional Development to ensure that staff were within certification compliance and State Plan requirements. DSB had seven staff enrolled in master's programs in Rehabilitation Counseling, and one enrolled in Orientation and Mobility of the Blind (O and M) program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). Two of these were on track to graduate by 2021. One counselor had recently graduated and applied to take her Certified Rehabilitation Counselor's (CRC) Certificate.

### **Field Administrators Report**

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

Since January 1, 2020, DSB has received 194 OIB referrals and has 84 OIB consumers with open cases. Some of the services provided were assistive technology, technology training, medical treatment related to their vision, and Orientation and Mobility (O and M) training. The OIB policy manual was submitted to the DSB Board for approval. This policy was designed to provide guidance and support to staff to ensure that they can effectively and efficiently provide

services to the OIB consumers. Each stage of the OIB case was outlined and addressed to ensure the counselors know how to proceed and able to identify requirements for each stage. DSB has developed a case review process for OIB cases to ensure quality, as well as to assist counselors with tools to review and update their forms.

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

WINTAC has met monthly with both the DSB Pre-ETS Team and the performance measures team to provide guidance to the DSB with a focus on regulations and guidance. WINTAC has assisted DSB with policy review and guidance during the development of new policy and procedures. A TA session was held to review important areas for the upcoming RSA Monitoring. WINTAC staff offered insight into what to prepare for the virtual site visit.

### **Training – Dr. Megan Lamb**

Since the previous Board Meeting in June, DSB conducted three OIB trainings in July with the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC). DSB was able to have one training session on Low Vision Training, one on OIB assessment, and one dedicated to tips and best practices in the field. These trainings were conducted virtually. DSB also conducted a training on the consumer service NEWSLINE; DSB Field Staff were given information they could share with consumers and learned how to obtain an individual staff account, so they would be able to assist consumers with learning and accessing resources. QA offered trainings on Authorizations for the Field Staff to review best practices and offer solutions for common concerns. Also, the Secondary Approval Process for Authorizations was explained and reviewed. All vendor authorizations for VR must be reviewed by the counselor and supervisor prior to being issued and sent to the vendor. This would offer more opportunities for staff to catch errors and ensure they are following federal guidelines and definitions for services. QA continues to meet virtually with each region and offer individual technical assistance on case management topics focused on their needs and data. The OIB Policy is designed to provide guidance and support to staff to ensure that they can effectively and efficiently provide services. Each stage of the OIB case is outlined and addressed to ensure the counselors know how to proceed and the requirements for that stage. DSB would continue developing a case review process for OIB cases to help them ensure quality as well as review and update their forms. This is part of the process DSB had been working on with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), to keep both programs up to date.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Policy**

DSB continued working on drafts of the policy chapters for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) manual, as well as the forms that DSB uses for its programs. The goal is to ensure the policies and procedures are updated and provide clear guidance ensuring they are in line with federal regulations. As chapters are reviewed and finalized, they will be submitted to the DSB Board for review and approval. Chapters 1-3 of the VR manual were submitted for this meeting.

### **Vending Facility Program (VFP) Administrator's Report – Jim Pearson**

Business and Technology Program Manager Jim Pearson gave a report for the Vending Facility Program (VFP). Mr. Pearson reported that, because of new regulations, Covid-19 had made operations challenging for the VFP program. Mr. Pearson reported that vending managers in other states indicated that many locations are shut down or reduced to vending machine operations only, and some are not reopening. All, but one of the VFP highway locations were open for business. The White River site, the largest location, is closed because of a break in the sewer line that has not been repaired. Travel on the interstate has slowed down since March and sales were down 50% with commissions reduced accordingly. There are two manager run vending sites currently closed. The vending site at the Veteran's Administration (VA) in Fayetteville has closed because of new restrictions on people entering the building, and the VFP manager is not allowed in the building because he is not a federal employee. The VA indicated that it may be November or the first of the year before this site is reopened. The VFP manager in the Federal Building, in Little Rock, is in the same situation and, with VA phasing employees back to work, they have not fully reopened.

### **VFP Management Opportunities – Jim Pearson**

The VFP had three vacant locations; the Pulaski County Court House, the Department of Human Services (DHS) on Main Street, and the Pulaski County Revenue Department were all three vending machine operation only. These three locations were currently open for a new manager.

### **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Changes – Jim Pearson**

Mr. Pearson reported that the RSA federal officials are requiring many changes in the VFP's policy and procedure manual. This had been a lengthy process, with changes that began in December 2019, and would require many meetings over the following months. Most changes would start going into effect on re-opening of the sites, in the next fiscal year, as early as August 2020, or January 1, 2021. RSA's goal would be to make vending managers independent entrepreneurs and less dependent on the VFP.

### **Questions**

Sandy Rowland noted that his site at Freeway Medical was shut as well, because the new standards for Covid-19 did not allow him to remain open.

Jim Pearson clarified that the new regulations did not allow Mr. Rowland's location to reopen. Because of the size of his snack bar, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Arkansas Health Department regulations would not allow him to reopen. It is closed and the VFP is doing a vending contract at Freeway Medical.

Bill Johnson asked about promotion with vending sites now that DSB is under the Department of Commerce. He asked if it were possible to do a promotional video about the highway vending sites encouraging people to utilize them. He mentioned that some were shut down for a long time to remodel and people may have forgotten about them. He said he realized this will cost money but asked if there was some promotion that could be done about the vending sites.

Jim Pearson said DSB mentioned that he will continue to explore options to promote the program. The director and some commissioners of the Highway Department had recently changed, and that may be an avenue VFP could pursue. Director Bennett had left about four months before this meeting; he had been instrumental in helping to keep these operations going. He noted that one of the biggest problems in keeping these facilities open is a water line and sewer line that were damaged at the White River facility. This is a newly renovated operation and promotion would be good.

Bill Johnson asked if promotion would help, or if it is mostly transit and they would not get the message, anyway.

Jim Pearson said it is mostly transit. During the holidays Parks and Tourism will put out advertising that mentions the rest areas, but they do not mention the vending operations.

Basil Julian asked whether there was signage at those sites like the one at the Social Hill, for example, that mentions these vending services were for “Services for the Blind” or that if someone buys one more bag of chips that money is going to assist a person who is blind or disabled?

Mr. Pearson said in the past they have allowed signage but at the new sites they have not.

#### **Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) – Theresa Bertram**

Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) supervisor Theresa Bertram provided an update on AIRS. Ms. Bertram reported the computer program Flash will no longer be supported after the end of 2020. With this change it may be possible that AIRS will need a new website. She mentioned that retired supervisor Shawn Smith will finish up volunteering after the end of the year and that she hopes to fill the extra position soon. Also, White Cane Day was October 15th and she attended online, via Facebook Live, the event at the World services for the Blind.

There are 2400 listeners at AIRS/AETN.org. AETN 4 (2.4 on antenna, or most cable systems, not including Comcast) had MTS or SAP 100/week audio will change, but picture will not. At AIRS+

there are 24 local papers. They have just updated, with circulation of over 10,000 papers one can listen to, or one can listen to with 350 listeners. 4200 radio listeners on NEWSLINE, with 300 signed up. AIRS continue to do COVID-19 awareness programs.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Combined Agency Proposal Update – Joseph Baxter ARS Commissioner**

Joseph Baxter, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) Commissioner, began his address by welcoming to the ARS team Deputy commissioner Christy Lamas. Mr. Baxter reported that the proposed drafted legislation for combined VR agency of the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) and ARS had been submitted to the Governor's office ahead of the deadline. A response has not been received from the Governor's office. RSA is proceeding with the timeline and waiting for the Governor to notify. September 17<sup>th</sup> will be the next State Rehab Council meeting. Notification to DSB Board will be disseminated.

### **Comment – Teresa Sheeler**

Teresa Sheeler gave an update on the combined agency proposal. She stated that she wanted to go on record that DSB Board of Director's drafted a letter which was sent to the Governor's office. The Board members had already received a copy of this letter, along with the Mississippi State information attached to that letter.

### **Report to RSA Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Update – Crystal Anderson**

Crystal Anderson gave an update on the WIOA report. She stated that DSB's focus was on accountability and reinforced the significance of data used to make informed choices. She thanked Dr. Megan Lamb for helping to complete this report. There are six WIOA performance measures, employment, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit, employment rate 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit, median earnings 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit, credential attainment, and effectiveness in serving employers. Arkansas specifically measures employer penetration and retention rate. For measurable skill gains (MSG) in Program Year 2019 (PY19), which is July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, DSB had 66 measurable skill gains. There were 35 secondary diplomas and 34 secondary report cards or post-secondary transcripts. Three consumers had both, but DSB can only count one MSG per consumer per year. For credential attainment there were five Credential attainments, one vocational or technical certificate, one associate degree, and three bachelor's degrees. Under WIOA, from the federal standpoint, there is a push toward credential attainment and measurable skill gains. Regarding the employment measures under WIOA, the employment rate for PY19, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit, 27%, or 97 participants. For the fourth quarter after exit, there were 31.4% or 125 participants. This showed growth between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters after exit for PY19. Median wages at exit DSB reported a median rate of \$11 per 40 hours per week. For

the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit DSB reported \$5892.21 per quarter. Ms. Anderson explained the reason for using hourly wage in one measure and quarterly earnings in the other. When they exit, DSB measures by hourly rate for AWARE case-management system, but when they report, DSB uses unemployment insurance wage data and they pull that quarterly, by quarterly earnings. For the retention rate, serving the same employers for PY19, for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit, DSB reported almost 49.8% with 103 participants. Almost 50% of the participants were still employed for the same employer almost one year after exit, good for employment longevity.

### **Comparing Program Years 2019 and 2018**

Regarding these numbers for 2018, July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019. A comparison of the numbers from previous program year showed that program year 2018 (PY18) showed 62 secondary diplomas, with a total of 35 for this year, PY19. For PY18, DSB showed 20 post-secondary report cards and transcripts, and for PY19 DSB showed 34, an increase. For skills progressions in PY18 DSB showed 6, and for PY19 DSB showed no skills progressions. Regarding credential attainment for PY18, DSB showed one vocational or technical license. For PY19 DSB showed one. For PY18 there were two vocational or technical certificates, and for PY19 there were none. For PY18 there were zero associate degrees, and for PY19 there was one. For PY18 DSB saw seven bachelor's degree recipients, and for PY19 there were 3. For PY2018 there was one master's degree, and for PY19 there were none.

Regarding the employment rate after exit, in PY18 DSB had 131 employed in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit, for PY19 there were 97. There were fewer in this category, but when combining 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters after exit there is an increase in PY19. For PY18 there were 65 employed in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit, and in PY19 there were 125 employed in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit, which was a considerable increase. In the comparison for effectiveness serving employers DSB saw a considerable increase. In PY18 the number for retention was 46, and in PY19 103. Ms. Anderson stated that the data outlines considerable implications regarding what is working well and what could be done more effectively. DSB would continue implementing QA strategies, through training and technical assistance, case reviews, and field consultations, to ensure everyone understands this data at a high level, and how it has an impact on DSB's funding.

### **2020 DSB Employee of the Year Process – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes reported on the 2020 DSB Employee of the Year (EOY) process. At the time of this meeting, DSB completed their Performance, Goal Compensation System (PGCS) process and had several staff that received exceptional ratings as Role Model and Highly Effective. DSB may have to cancel the in person statewide meeting to meet COVID-19 guidelines. Ms. Barnes stated that DSB would work with the Board to determine whether DSB

could honor a 2020 Employee of the Year, and how they would do so virtually. She stated that the DSB Board Chairman may wish to appoint a committee to conduct the selection process.

### **2020 DSB Consumer of the Year Process – Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes**

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes reported on the 2020 Consumer of the Year (COY) process. DSB was not meeting with consumers face-to-face, but they were continuing with the COY process. Each counselor had been assigned a month in which their COY nomination was due to DSB administration. Once that submission and the consumer's signed release had been received, DSB would order the trophy for the consumer, and the employer, to be sent to the local counselor's office. Because of Covid-19, the local presentations of the award are not being held in 2020. COY names will be added to the DSB website and displayed on AIRS in December.

### **Consumer Input**

#### **American Council of the Blind (ACB) – Theresa Petrey**

Mrs. Theresa Petrey gave a report for the American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the state chapter, the Arkansas Council of the Blind. The 2020 national convention was done virtually, would have been in Schaumburg, Ill. There were presenters who did call in and give a report. Karen Keninger, Director of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Library of Congress (NLS), reported that the NLS is working on the development of the Braille E-Reader to help access books from the NLS to the BARD website. This may help eliminate the problem of having to return a book and aid some disabled people who cannot keep a physical copy of a book because of their living circumstances. Also, they announced the scholarship winners from all around the country. A representative from the World Blind Union, who lives in New Zealand, talked about the opportunities for the blind in her country. She was born in Namibia, raised in South Africa, and eventually moved to New Zealand. They also had an "Angel Presentation". They would honor members of the ACB who have recently passed, and sometimes include guide dogs as well. A person would read a script of what the member did and contributed to ACB. She mentioned that Arkansas' local Dick Seifert passed away in January 2020. Margaret Johnson did a wonderful presentation for the Angel Wall. They had breakout sessions on how transportation is provided in various parts of the country including rural and urban areas. Ida Leigh discussed the status of Braille; ACB is trying to keep Braille going so that Blind individuals will continue to be able to read materials in Braille. Mrs. Petrey serves as an officer for the ACB at both federal and state levels. She is the secretary of the 23rd chapter of the American Council of the Blind Board, and at the state level she is the first vice-president of the Arkansas Council of the Blind.

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

Teresa “Terry” Sheeler, State President of National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas, reported that she lost her father-in-law during the time of the NFB national convention and she did not have a report for the DSB Board. In the previous DSB Board meeting on July 6, 2020 Ms. Sheeler had announced the dates of the coming national and state conventions. The NFB national convention for 2020 was scheduled to take place by virtual meeting from July 14<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup>, with Zoom as the main platform.

## **New Business**

### **Policy Review of OIB and VR Manuals**

#### **Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Explanation – Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes**

Dr. Cassondra Williams-Stokes reported the changes in policy manuals had been made to ensure DSB would follow current policy. She suggested that all four policy changes could be listed and voted on as a group instead of individually. There went without objection from the DSB Board.

#### **Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Policy Manual – Dr. Megan Lamb**

Dr. Megan Lamb, Field Service Administrator, gave a report on the new OIB policy. This policy is almost completely new since DSB did not have a recent policy for OIB. The policy was developed using resources from the OIB TAC and federal regulations. OIB in general is not as strict as VR policy on items such as signatures, etc. Therefore, in cases where it was left to the agency, they aligned the OIB Policy with their VR policy to ensure that they were consistent for our counselors. All services listed in the OIB manual come directly from the RSA policy directives on OIB. The same groupings and subheadings were used to ensure consistency. These also match what is in AWARE. Additionally, the definitions were based on the RSA PD 20-01. DSB can pay for surgical or therapeutic treatment to prevent, correct, or modify disabling eye conditions. DSB policy for OIB will allow for prescriptions or injections related to these procedures to be paid for up to 60 days.

The focus of OIB is on living independently, therefore the services and goals of each consumer focused on improving their ability to function independently or maintain their independence.

For authorizations, the OIB policy would require DSB is notified at least 15 business days prior to the services, with the same previous exceptions to post authorizations as in the VR policy (anesthesia, radiology, eyeglasses, and emergencies).

## **Questions**

Ms. Sheeler asked for clarification on the face-to-face meetings. Regarding the regulation on time, were there any adjustments being made with the current Covid-19 crisis.

Dr. Lamb said they do not have to be face-to-face, but that it could be taken out of the policy.

Ms. Sheeler said a note could be added.

Dr. Williams-Stokes said in the past a field administrative, or Director's, directive added to the policy to address the issue.

Ms. Sheeler said you could add the directive.

Dr. Williams-Stokes said this is a cleaner way to make the policy change.

## VR Policy manual

### Ch 1. General Requirement

#### Chapter 1 General Requirements

Much of Chapter 1 is the same content as in the current VR policy manual. However, it had been reviewed to ensure we follow federal guidelines and to improve wording and clarity. Highlight some of the changes:

#### 1.4 Competitive Integrated Employment

This definition had been updated to reflect the federal guidelines based on feedback and examples from WINTAC. The definition comes from 34 CFR 361.5 (c) (9) and uses a broader definition than the "majority of employees" definition DSB has used in the past. This definition allows for a better match to a consumer's workplace and daily interactions.

#### 3.13 Dual Case Files

This is referencing the federal guidance on how DSB may hold a dual case with another VR agency. While this is most commonly with ARS, this may also apply to agencies out of state as needed and how that process impacts federal reporting.

#### 1.14 Timeliness

DSB counselors will now be required to have documented contact with the consumer every 45 days instead of every 90 days. The goal with this change is to reduce loss of contact with consumers.

#### 1.17 Counselor Change Requests

While DSB had always had the ability to transfer a case should the need arise, our current manual only indicates it is acceptable for a consumer who relocates. This section provides examples of additional times a transfer may occur, such as a consumer request and outlines the procedures for how the transfer will occur.

### 1.19 Vacant Caseloads

Previous DSB policy only allowed for the Area Manager to work a vacant caseload. The new policy would allow the Area Manager to work with the Field Administrator to reassign cases from the vacant caseload, to assist with serving those consumers more effectively

Dr. Williams-Stokes clarified that regarding the change in documented contact, DSB QA will monitor in the AWARE database to ensure these new requirements are addressed.

## Chapter 3 – Referral and Intake

DSB added a more detailed section on the referral process and combined it with Application to ensure staff were aware of the timelines and procedures for both. There was not a specific referral chapter or application chapter before. It was included in parts of the overall process and assessment chapters. This places it in its correct location for the VR process.

### 3.1.1 Completing Referrals

DSB is still completing referrals and have updated their procedures to better reflect the new procedures. The new process allows DSB to more accurately track received referrals to ensure follow ups are occurring and allow us to better document contacts with referrals. Additionally, they added that if a consumer and counselor could meet with the consumer within 10 days, this must be fully documented in AWARE.

### 3.1.2 Types of Referrals

DSB added a section to address all 3 referral types OIB, VR, and Pre-ETS.

### 3.1.3 Contact with Consumer

DSB updated this section to include the procedures for virtual/phone contacts reflecting the procedures implemented with Covid-19 to ensure that practices were consistent. Referrals must be contacted within 1 business day of assignment and the orientation occur within 10 business days. Regular contact with a consumer is addressed in Policy Section 1.14 Timeliness.

## 3.5 Internal Controls

DSB added this section at WINTAC's recommendation to address the internal controls related to this section. It discusses reports that staff and administration can run to stay on top of their caseloads. It also addresses the audits conducted by Quality Assurance.

## Chapter 2 – Informed Choice

Informed Choice is Chapter 6 in the current DSB manual. So, DSB moved it forward since it should inform the entire VR process. Very little changed in this chapter outside of cleaning up

language and relocation for clarity. The importance of informed choice is consistent, and they want to make sure staff understand its role in VR.

Basil Julian moved to adopt all policy changes to OIB and Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the VR policy manuals. Theresa Petrey seconded the motion. A Board Vote was taken. The motion carried.

### **Computer and Technology Lab Report – Gustavo Manzanales**

Gustavo Manzanales, Computer and Technology Supervisor – gave a report on the DSB Computer and Technology Lab. Mr. Manzanales provided an overview of current policy regarding referrals, evaluations, recommendations, and training. Mr. Manzanales stated the different levels of access and technology a blind or visually impaired client would need. Some with low vision would only need magnification, others would need a combination of magnification and a screen reader. If a client is totally blind would need a screen-reader software like JAWS, Voiceover on Apple devices, Talkback on Android devices, etc. Some clients will be deaf-blind and may receive information only in Braille. Refreshable Braille is always the main option when teaching computers and tech access, of course taking in consideration the degree of vision and hearing loss. The Tech Lab had recently gotten their technology up to date. They had a partnership Nano-Pac, a technology company who loaned the Tech Lab some equipment. A client can use Nano-Pac as a Windows system when used with a computer mouse. Another device is El-Braille, a portable Braille device, which is a unit that can help with Braille support for a regular laptop. It is a Windows 10 device with a Braille reader attached and the client does not need a monitor. Another device is a Magna-Link; a tablet with Windows 10 surface pro. Can also turn a laptop into a CCTV. The consumer can point the camera to a board in a classroom and it will read for them. This device can serve three or four functions in a classroom. Also, there is an OrCam, a small camera attached to glasses which can read print material from any surface. This is used mainly for reading signs and documents. Another blind service is Aira, an application on a consumer's phone. A consumer pays a monthly service to ask an agent, sitting at a computer with access to the camera, and the agent will give feedback on what is needed visually. Aira has access to the client's location and cell phone. This service can be applied, for example, in a situation to help guide a blind person to a building for an appointment or read a document.

### **Client Assessment – Gustavo Manzanales**

To make client recommendations, DSB will see clients in the lab and after the assessment will write recommendations for the client's job, their home, independent living, etc. For a student, they may recommend a laptop with JAWS software, or a screen reader, like Voiceover or Talkback. The acronym for JAWS means Job Access with Speech produced by the Blind and Low Vision Group of Freedom Scientific. All these products read text out loud for a client. For others

the Tech Lab might recommend a Braille device or Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software to read a handout in class. Not everyone reads Braille, in many cases audible feedback is preferred. It depends on each person's level of vision and how much tech they know. An older individual may not be good with technology they would look at the easiest piece of technology, one that does not interface with a computer.

### **Changes with Covid-19 – Gustavo Manzanales**

Some of the Covid-19 changes. Some evaluations have been made over the phone. This is usually a questionnaire about computer skills; do they know how to use a computer, can they type? They always prefer for them to come into the lab for evaluation and training on the new equipment. They can then show them the devices and spend extra time demonstrating how they work. Would like them to see use the equipment they are recommending.

### **Improvements in Customer Service – Gustavo Manzanales**

With the changes in training, the turn-around can be faster. Before, they would have to schedule a date and time for the client to come in and that might prolong the overall service. The tech lab has training over the phone. They also have training remotely, over a computer using JAWS-tandem a way to access remotely the client's computer. For equipment pick up, once the equipment comes to the Tech Lab and had been set up, they will call the client, or schedule for a counselor to get that equipment to the client. The client will need to drive up and a counselor will meet them in the parking lot. For a while the Department of Workforce Services was not allowing clients to come into the building and staff were only providing phone evaluations, but that policy had become a little more relaxed by this meeting.

Dr. Williams-Stokes pointed out that, regarding the loan from Nano-Pac. When DSB gets equipment from a vendor, it is only on loan from the who pays that, and that equipment DSB is loaned from a company to check out before it is bought for the client.

Mr. Manzanales said they focus on the mainstream types of technology, such as Apple, and Google is a big one during this Covid-19 crisis.

### **Questions**

Keith Clark asked whether it would work on any CPU with Windows 10, or a special one?

Mr. Manzanales said they had been adding software to a magna-link and to a surface device.

Now they are selling the software and camera alone and it can be added to a laptop computer.

Larry Wayland asked how the Tech Lab is handling the equipment. When Mr. Wayland worked for DSB they would have a client come in and a counselor would identify to the client what the equipment was, and they would sign a "title agreement".

Mr. Manzanales said that procedure is still in place. He also mentioned that DSB still gets calls from people 25 years later for the Tech Lab. He stated that It is an on-going process to help clients.

#### **DSB Board Annual Training – Terry Sheeler**

The meeting for DSB Board Annual Training, in December 2020, will be virtual. The consumer meetings, the NCSRC and NFB conventions will be at the same time. The Board does usually train at that same time. This year it will need to be done virtually.

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes stated that she has inquired about scheduling an overview of the proposed legislation. Charles Leifert has agreed to conduct the training after the Governor approves the legislation to move forward. The training should be less than 2 hours and the board will be notified when more information becomes available.

Bill Johnson suggested this could be a virtual training using the Zoom platform. He also suggested that Gustavo Manzanales could contribute to this session with more detail on the new technology available to blind and visually impaired clients.

Terry Sheeler agreed and asked Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes to add these two subjects to the training.

Dr. Williams-Stokes agreed to set this up and would for the Board.

#### **Quarterly Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) Board Report – Keith Clark**

Keith Clark, OIB Board Chair, and DSB Board Member, gave a report on the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program. OIB has a new advisory council with Keith Clark as Chair, Sandy Edwards as Vice-Chair, and Pat Smith is the Secretary, beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>.

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

Friends of Arkansas Information Reading Service (FAIRS) president, Larry Wayland, provided an update. Mr. Wayland reported that a long-time FAIRS Board member Darrel Coleman passed away on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Coleman had served as Treasurer and Secretary of the FAIRS Board. The last two FAIRS Board meetings took place virtually, and the next meeting will take

place in November. Mr. Wayland asked the DSB Board members, and all in attendance of this meeting, to invite blind and DSB clients to participate in NEWSLINE and AIRS.

**Disability Rights Arkansas (DRA) – Tom Masseau**

No representative from Disability Rights Arkansas responded to give a report.

**Arkansas Statewide Independent Living Council (ARSILC) – Sha’ Anderson**

Arkansas Statewide Independent Living Council (ARSILC) Executive Director, Sha’ Anderson, gave her report. She announced an event to take place on Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> called “Victory in Your Vote”. A Word document with the link to register for this event had been sent to DSB and World Services for the Blind (WSB). Guest speakers have been set up as well as skills training for participants at this event. Ms. Anderson invited all to attend.

Terry Sheeler reminded the Board that her ARSILC reports were included in the DSB Board packet.

**Arkansas Council of the Blind – Theresa Petrey**

Theresa Petrey, president of the Arkansas Council of the Blind, the local chapter of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), gave her report. The local Arkansas ACB Chapter was scheduled to have a meeting by teleconference the following day, September 12<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am. They have had virtual meetings since May, due to the pandemic. In June, Charles Frasier, director of Rock Region Metro was on the call. Mr. Frasier discussed updates at Rock Region Metro and a program called “Ride 2020”. This will provide expansion with the fixed route and with Links, which provides paratransit for the disabled on the fixed route. Ms. Petrey said she is excited about the new program because she will personally benefit from the expansion. She reported that the Arkansas Chapter did not have a call in July because of ACB National Convention. During the meeting in August they mentioned that their regular meeting room is still closed, due to Covid-19, and their meetings should continue with the meetings online.

**National Federation of the Blind (NFB) State Convention 2020**

The meeting previously scheduled as “in person” for the NFB State Convention had been rescheduled as a “virtual” meeting on the Zoom platform and was to take place on November 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. You can registrar at [nfbar.org](http://nfbar.org). There is no charge for registration, but you must be registered and a paid dues member by October 15<sup>th</sup>, if you would like to vote. There will be a specific phone number for those who would like to vote. The national convention is scheduled for July 6<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> 2021, and will be in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Washington seminar will be on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in Washington D.C., and she suggested that anyone interested in attending should visit their website. All the contact information will be listed on the website.

**Next Meeting**

The next scheduled DSB Quarterly Board Meeting will be Friday, December 11, 2020, at 1:00 p.m. Tentatively scheduled as a teleconference or Zoom meeting.

Meeting adjourned.