

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 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
Stephanie Smith, ASBVI

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

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

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

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, 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. Keith Clark seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

APPROVAL OF 03-10-2017 MINUTES. Motion was made by Mr. Keith Clark to approve the March 10, 2017 minutes. Basil Julian seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

Vice Chair Bill Johnson introduced new Board Member Ms. Stephanie Smith. Ms. Smith has been employed with the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for 10 years as a teacher and is a certified Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI). She has been a transition specialist and worked with Jump Start for about six years. Ms. Smith told the Board, "I am really excited to be a part of this."

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Katy Morris

Thank you to everybody for being here today. It is both a happy time and a sad time. We will be losing Coral Virden to retirement at the end of this month. We will also be losing Linda Haynes at the end of this month. Thanks to Cassondra, we are on top of these vacancies trying to get them filled quickly. Obviously, it is going to take us a lot longer to replace the individuals than it does to just to fill the positions.

NATIONAL ISSUES:

As I mentioned last meeting, the federal Department of Education acknowledged that Secretary Betsy DeVos had received the letter from the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind expressing its concern about the age at which pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) can be initiated under WIOA. The DOE interpretation of WIOA holds that each state's Education and Voc-Rehab agencies must agree upon a common age at which Pre-ETS services will begin in their states. In Arkansas, the Department of Education and ARS have agreed that the beginning age will be 16, therefore DSB is subject to that standard. Historically, DSB has provided transition services beginning at age 14. Postponing certain services until age 16 is both a programmatic and financial concern. First, because students with vision problems need services younger and second because the 14 to 16 age group is unable to take advantage of the 15 percent Pre-ETS set-aside funding established by Congress. NCSAB has not received a response to the letter.

Federal Hiring Freeze – The federal hiring freeze is still affecting DSB and WSB, but I will let Sharon elaborate on that later.

Convenings – Information Sessions on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (termed “Convenings”) continue, but these regional meetings appear to have become opportunities for dialogue between partner agencies that did not communicate before. In Arkansas, the partners have been meeting frequently ever since the Act was passed.

Vending – Nationally, Agencies serving individuals who are blind have been concerned about the proposed commercialization of rest stops along interstate highway systems. If private entities like Wendy's and McDonald's successfully bid for those locations, it would produce a lot of income for those private companies and produce significant revenue to support highway infrastructure, but would reduce or eliminate the income that funds vendor retirement in some states, including Arkansas.

CSAVR/NCSAB – In April, I attended the back-to-back conferences of Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind in April. Bill Johnson attended the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils' conference.

While at CSAVR, I accompanied Massachusetts Commissioner Paul Sanger and Pris Rogers of the American Foundation for the Blind to Capitol Hill to visit with several members of Congress about the underfunding of the Older Blind program. We provided statistics and answered questions. The members each suggested the OIB Coalition “up its game” by making multiple contacts with Republican Congressmen. AFB is scheduling such meetings now.

STATE ISSUES:

ACB State Convention– DSB staff enjoyed meeting with ACB at its state convention in Fayetteville in April. Everyone agreed it was a very successful convention. I didn’t get to go to Crystal Bridges, but I understand those who did really benefitted.

DHS Reorganization – The General Assembly met this spring, and DSB closely tracked the bill on the reorganization of DHS, which restructures the department to bring about efficiencies. It transfers divisional staff under newly created “Chiefs” and redraws lines of authority. However, unlike our sister agencies in DHS, DSB is prohibited by federal regulations from transferring its staff under the line supervision of anyone outside DSB. On a related issue, federal WIOA regulations still preserve the line authority of DSB, but now mandate DSB and its WIOA Partners (including ARS) to transfer and strategically co-locate staff and resources into DWS one-stop locations. Those primary partners include Dislocated Workers, Youth, Adult Education and Employment Services, along with Arkansas Rehab.

Pay Plan – During the session, the legislature passed a new pay plan, which helps recruitment but creates imbalances. People who joined the agency recently will likely be earning very near to what their supervisors and DSB veteran staff members earn. The plan did create a pool of positions where agencies can exchange one position for another to address inequities. DSB still has three area field supervisors graded higher than the other two, though all five perform identical job functions. This inequity is very likely to impede DSB in recruiting area supervisors.

DSB ISSUES:

Transparency. DSB is preparing to use the DHS Share intranet to post our internal policies, travel calendar, travel budget, etc., so it is more transparent for staff. For example, staff could look at the travel budget and see whether there are funds budgeted to attend a particular training that interests them. DSB may be planning (as we did last month) to send selected staff to state ARA, because they need the continuing education units for their certification. Using the intranet, we will be sharing more information more timely with staff members.

Field Manual – DSB is updating the field policy manual to include directives issued since the last update. Otherwise staff may not have received the subsequent directives. Amanda Connell has been leading this project.

End of Director’s Report.

Progress on Implementation of WIOA – Betsy Barnes (Ms. Barnes joined DSB in April as the Field Services Administrator.

Ms. Barnes reported that the main focus of DSB is to provide quality services for the individuals we serve in a manner that complies with WIOA. She thanked area managers and staff for the wonderful job they are doing during this implementation phase.

Section 511 – Section 511 of WIOA provides that state VR agencies can no longer recognize subminimum jobs as vocational outcomes, and instead supports the transition to integrated, competitive employment or post-secondary education activities. This corresponds to what the Employment First Initiative has been trying to achieve for so long and what DSB has supported. DSB does not have any consumers that have been placed in a subminimum wage position. Section 511 opens the door for Supported Employment and Customized Employment and DSB is concentrating staff training in these areas.

Supported Employment Vendors - DSB continues to partner with its historic Employment Network (EN) providers, but is also developing agreements with new ones. We are in discussions with an EN from Louisiana that proposes to partner with DSB to provide supported employment statewide in Arkansas. We are always looking for new vendors and seeking to educate employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with vision impairment and blindness.

DSB Pre-employment Transition Services – WIOA is strong on promoting youth through Pre-ETS. The Pre-ETS counselors are assigned to schools across the state. DSB is limited to serving ages 16 to graduation with the Pre-ETS funding, so after graduation they return to the VR counselors to pursue post-secondary education or employment.

Contractual Pre-Employment Transition Services (WSB) – DSB is developing a contract with World Services for the Blind to do mini-workshops across the state for Pre-ETS. These will be on two day or four day schedules. WSB will involve young consumers in select Pre-ETS activities. WSB will also support some mentoring activities and ACT classes this fall. DSB also will be developing workshops to educate parents on the advantages of students working and to reduce or eliminate any misconceptions regarding loss of benefits.

Reporting Requirements and Performance Accountability – With the receipt of federal funds comes the requirement for accountability. We have to tell the government how we are serving the people and how we are spending the money. Year-to-date we have had 211 closures, up from 196 as the same time last year. The average weekly wage of the individuals was \$497.80. This week we have completely updated our AWARE database system to comply with all the WIOA performance measures. We will now do additional training with our staff, so that, come July 1, they can start reporting the performance measures newly required under WIOA. Field Staff has also been conducting extensive case review. I just got off the phone with Florida before the board meeting and got details about their recent experience with federal review. This gives us a

better understanding of how to construct our internal case reviews to prepare us for federal review.

Workforce Involvement – Obviously, employment doesn't happen without employers, so counselors are always engaging business. One way the law provides for them to engage business is through counselor membership on the local Workforce boards. The DSB counselors on the local boards are actively involved in development of the local workforce plans. Other DSB staff are equally involved in the review of the 10 local plans that cover the state.

Vision Quest – Arkansas has a Vision Quest team which has put together an agreement among all the WIOA partner agencies regarding what responsibilities each partner will have in implementing WIOA in the State of Arkansas. The Directors of the partner agencies will sign this document on August 15. We had hoped to get it signed yesterday, but it didn't happen.

Helen Keller Proclamation – The week of June 25-July 1 is Helen Keller Deaf-blind Awareness Week. A presentation is planned in the Governor's conference room at the Capitol on June 27, at 9:45a.m. We look forward to having the Governor present a proclamation recognizing the event. He will present it to Chad Ing, a DSB consumer who is deaf-blind. Representatives from other agencies supporting individuals who are deaf-blind will also be in attendance.

Consumer Group Conferences – DSB staff Amber Neal and Cynthia Hastings will be attending the national ACB conference in Nevada. DSB staff Ester Lunnie and Shayla Nelson will be attending the national NFB conference in Florida.

Jump Start – Jump Start 2017 started last Sunday and has been going strong all week. We have 19 participants this year. They spend the first half of the day working jobs, based on their interests, such as the Clinton Center, Arkansas Children's Hospital, ICAN, and Mainstream, just to name a few. In the afternoons, the students do classroom activities, job readiness training, and career exploration, and in the evenings, they have a wonderful time with social activities. On June 22, they will participate in Jump Start graduation and present a talent show.

End of DSB Field Report

DSB Director Katy Morris added that under the new combined state plan, DSB was required to commit that DSB will not do business with entities that pay subminimum wage. This was not difficult, since DSB has not placed clients in subminimum wage jobs for many years. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has some 4,500 individuals in subminimum wage jobs and was recently commended by RSA for actions to reduce that number.

Regarding Employer Engagement, one of the problems DSB faces is that under WIOA, counselors are not supposed to be contacting employers exclusively on behalf of DSB clients. They are supposed to be part of a team representing the interests of all jobseekers. Of course,

that is going to put clients who are blind and visually impaired at a distinct disadvantage. We have tried our way around that and gotten nowhere.

Regarding Jump Start, I want to particularly recognize Pine Bluff Area Pre-ETS Counselor LaTasha Mays for her leadership. She is our point person for Jump Start this year.

OLD BUSINESS:

Progress of 2017 Consumer of the Year Process – Betsy Barnes

Betsy Barnes reported that local area COY nominations are progressing. Sharese Ross was recognized in Fort Smith at the Lions Club June 6. On June 19, Lorri Jacot will be honored in Danville.

Plan for 2017 Employee of the Year Process – Cassandra Williams-Stokes

The 2017 Employee of the Year event is coming up. Chairman Terry Sheeler has already appointed her EOY committee. The process and schedule will follow that of 2016. I will email that information to the board EOY committee members and anyone else Mrs. Sheeler directs. I know our staff are excited about having the opportunity to win both the cash prize and the honor of being named the best Employee of the Year. We are looking forward to the recommendations made to the full board by the committee.

OIB Committee – The Board Chairman reported that during the OIB meeting this morning she asked that the WSB contract information be shared with the board OIB subcommittee, which is composed of Chairman Sheeler, Vice-Chairman Bill Johnson, Secretary Sandy Edwards and Keith Clark.

NEW BUSINESS:

SFY 2018 Budget – Cassandra Williams-Stokes, DSB Assistant Director

State Fiscal Year 2017 Closeout – We are working with the field and finance staffs to make sure our general revenue is fully expended. The staff have done an excellent job with commitments. We have about \$7,000 left today. We are in the process of allocating that and making sure it is expended, so by June 30 we will not have any state revenue left, which is always our goal for each year's budget.

State Fiscal Year 2018 Budget – When we submitted the plan in May, we had to make one adjustment due to the Governor's efforts to balance the state budget. DSB lost about \$2,000 of what we usually receive in state general revenue. The division is still in a great position to meet its federally-required Maintenance of Effort (match) by the September 30 deadline this year.

Merit Pay – The Governor graciously allowed merit bonuses to be paid this year. Eligible staff will receive those 1, 2 or 3% bonuses on June 23, in a lump sum. We do not have any eligible staff that did not qualify for a bonus this year, so that is saying a lot. That means everyone was rated “Satisfactory, Above Average or Excellent”. Staff who have been on board for at least one year are eligible to participate in the bonus, based upon his or her performance.

Recruitment –Crystal Anderson has been promoted to *Quality Assurance Coordinator*, the position vacated due to the retirement of 35 year veteran Feona Barnett. Crystal will mainly manage our AWARE database and provide AWARE training. We want to congratulate Crystal and wish her well in her new position. The new DSB *Staff Development Coordinator* should be on board July 3. Our *Chief Fiscal Officer* position had been vacant since November 2016. We had offered it, but those two individuals were unable to accept the position due to the salary. We just went through the process again and finished the interviews. Hopefully, the new CFO will be on board sometime in July. I want to especially thank our Finance staff. When you have vacant positions, especially the Chief Fiscal Officer, for an agency for this length of time and still continue to move forward and produce, then you have done an excellent job. I want to thank them for helping me stay on top of things.

Partnership – Our advertisements of vacancies are routinely emailed to the state presidents of ACB and NFB so that they may share them with their consumers who are jobseekers. DSB promotes the position that the division is in the business of hiring qualified individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired, and we look forward to a continuation of that recruiting partnership with both consumer groups.

QUARTERLY REPORTS:

QUARTERLY FAIRS ACTIVITIES – Larry Wayland, FAIRS Board President

Larry Wayland reported that there were currently 51 regular listeners of Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS), down from 72 listeners found in the previous survey. He described how the service could be accessed and said it is also being broadcast through the SAP feature on televisions on some of the Dish and cable networks. He noted that Shawn Smith said there had been about 6,000 downloads of articles through computers, but some of the usage was coming from out-of- state. AIRS/Newsline provides access to 300 magazines and newspapers from around the world. We are proud of the service, and I want the area supervisors to encourage their counselors to remind consumers that this service is available. Services for the Blind is paying for this service, and we need to utilize it. The website is www.aetn.org. You have to be a Newsline subscriber through the National Federation of the Blind to download articles. Arkansas is a participating state and eligible persons can call and get assigned a code. If you are eligible for the Library for the Blind services, you are eligible for the Newsline service. Shawn Smith is also looking for closed captioned descriptive movies.

The DSB Director said in talking to staff last week at AER, that some of them have phones with the capability to access and demonstrate AIRS/Newsline, but some don't. We need to have every one of the counselors connected so they can demonstrate the service. If you google NFB Newsline or NFB.org, the information will come up and list all the publications. Airs Plus also gives you access to grocery ads and book chapters that you don't get on the phone service. Liz Whitaker added that AIRS and Newsline are demonstrated in the Tech Lab, and her staff help people sign up for AIRS, Newsline, and the Library for the Blind services if they are not already signed up.

Quarterly OIB Contract Activity Report – Sharon Giovinazzo, WSB CEO

OIB Contract – WSB administers the OIB contract with DSB oversight. We are coming to the end of the year on the 2017 contract. We met and well exceeded the expectations of that contract. WSB continues to form medical partnerships throughout the state, and there are always in-kind benefits that come along with this contracting. That is why we can make the money go further. We are looking forward to the new contract. Dr. Baine, WSB's doctor, still provides over \$10,000 a month in insulin to OIB clients. So, obviously, there is a lot of added value with that. WSB now has people hired in four segments of the state, so the program gets better coverage than previously. Our contracted service providers are at least dually certified (in teaching visually impaired persons and in orientation and mobility instruction).

WSB Update – We have our first four summer students in from Arizona, and two of them have already started jobs. We have always had our college prep program, but last year we diversified and expanded it. All of the students coming this summer will have jobs within the community – or within WSB because we have some needs as an organization. One of the Arizona students wants to become a mortician, so we got him into a job-shadowing experience last year. He turns 18 this year, so he will be able to work at the office. We also have a trainee working at an eye doctor's office at Baptist Hospital. We are expecting about 20 more kids this summer. We just signed the contract for the three-year pilot of the national deaf-blind equipment distribution program....to become permanent. We plan to do some workshops throughout the state to provide orientation and mobility, independent living, self -advocacy, college prep, and other training.

IRS Program – The week the federal hiring freeze was enacted, I had 10 clients arrive for the IRS program, and I had to tell them that, because of the freeze, their class was not going forward. Luckily, we were able to absorb 80 percent of those into other programs of their choice. This has been a 50-year partnership with IRS. Since 1967, the IRS program has guaranteed employment to WSB graduates of the training program. However, over the years, the number of jobs available has significantly declined. October of 2015 was the last 26-week class that the IRS held on our campus. After that, classes were shortened to 10 weeks. Since we were a nongovernmental site, we could not have access to live databases. So there was a significant amount of training that had to be done by the IRS at the job sites. After the hiring freeze was lifted, the IRS was put under a

Workforce Reduction Action, so now the only people who will be hired by the IRS will be for seasonal employment. That will make it almost impossible to gain VR Counselor support. The IRS has come back to us saying they'd like to continue working with us, but in a different way, maybe the call center, customer service training, or adaptive technology training, but this makes it hard to place people. Over the last two years I have had 10 people start the IRS program and eight finish, so the suspension of the IRS Program is not going to have a huge impact for us. One of the people who finished our Assistive Technology Instructor Class came to us from Virginia and was just hired by the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind as an Assistive Technology Instructor. This will be her first job other than doing some public speaking when she previously lived in Lebanon. She is 43-years-old and will earn \$55,000 a year plus medical and a 401K.

I encourage anyone who wants to come by and visit or volunteer.....come on over... because we are bigger and better than ever.

QUARTERLY DISABILITY RIGHTS ARKANSAS (DRA) REPORT – Christian Adcock,
DRA Advocate

Since the beginning of our fiscal year, we have had 30 service requests from 28 individuals who are blind or have visual impairments. Concerns included special education, employment, rights violations, access, and accommodations. Several were information and referral kind of cases where we provided someone with resources, and some of them became direct advocate cases. I am not sure if any became legal cases; I don't have those numbers. We are having some self-advocacy classes around the state, starting in central Arkansas. I believe they will be in Sherwood and Little Rock July 21. You can get more information at Disabilityrightsar.org. We have a lot of materials on voting.

DSB Director Katy Morris stated that every year, every rehab agency in the nation must file a report if any legal action has come up between an advocacy program and a voc rehab unit. DSB has not had any in the prior year, and if DRA is going to have any issues for us this year....we haven't heard about it.

STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AR-SILC) – Sha Stephens

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

Pending Board Member Changes – Katy Morris

All of you are aware of who is eligible for reappointment and who will be rolling off the board when the Governor makes a replacement. I have heard nothing. If you are interested in reappointment, the Governor's website has a Boards and Commissions application process. It has a phone number if someone has any problems with the application process. When you apply, you will receive a confirmation in the form of a "thank you."

Election of Board Secretary – It was noted that DSB Board Secretary Sandy Edwards was term limited and would rotate off the board when the Governor appoints a new representative for ACB. That will also leave the board without a Secretary. Basil Julian nominated Keith Clark for Board Secretary when the Governor appoints a replacement for Sandy Edwards. Bill Johnson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously. **Motion Passed.** It was noted that positions for voting members are served until they are replaced.

CONSUMER INPUT:

Arkansas Council of the Blind. Sandy Edwards reported ACB has a chapter meeting in Little Rock at World Services for the Blind June 10, at 11 a.m. The ACB national convention will be held in Reno, Nevada June 30-July 7.

Larry Wayland reported the ADA Education and Reform Bill HR620 is going through Congress now and would weaken the ADA. It is still in committee. You can read about it in the NFB Forum. It is going to be more difficult for disabled people to report non-accessibility issues.

Keith Clark reported issues with voting machines and the need for larger print. The Board Chairman stated she can pass the information along. Every precinct should have accessible machines. SOURCES and ARSILC are resources on accessible machines.

Cassandra Williams-Stokes was appointed by the Governor to the SILC board about a month ago.

National Federation of the Blind. Terry Sheeler reported that the NFB national convention is July 10-15, in Orlando, Florida. The state convention is going to be in Fort Smith at the Doubletree Inn October 6-8.

SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – September 8, 2017, DPS First Floor, Conference Room A.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards
Secretary