

Annual Report 2013 Working Copy

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED ANNUAL REPORT

MISSION:

The mission of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired is to provide leadership and diverse viewpoints in partnership with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired to develop and evaluate programs and services; to identify priorities that help create opportunities, increase independence and broaden access to the workplace for citizens of all ages who are blind or visually impaired.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Council is to work in conjunction with the Director of the Division concerning policy and program issues, including the delivery of services. The Council provides a formal means to influence the direction and quality of services to the blind and visually impaired population of Maine at the systemic and policy level.

Letter From The Chair, SRC/DBVI December 30, 2013

This past year was another challenging year as the council worked hard to help improve services and to try to preserve the resources that remain available. As they SRC met many of these challenges the SRC and DBVI also had many successful accomplishments which are named later in this report.

In the current economic environment of diminishing resources and in a political environment of diffused interests and focuses challenges to the blindness system and the blind citizens of Maine promise to continue to grow as some get resolved and others evolve to take their place. Among other challenges we saw persistent threats to the BEP program and for one operator in particular which we hope will be positively resolved in the coming year. Additionally, the deadline for applying for and securing a Federal establishment project grant to establish a skills training center in Maine was missed due to last-minute, unexpected questions from others - we will push hard to ensure that efforts to secure such an essential, vital resource to the blind citizens of Maine are finally successful this year. Keeping the blindness services sufficiently staffed with first rate professionals continues to be difficult As we compete with other, higher paying states for them and as funding restricts the level of resources needed to recruit and retain them.

The SRC plans to devote much focus this coming year to improving our organization, functional efficiency, and overall effectiveness in order to successfully meet ongoing challenges, optimally accomplish our mandated tasks, and to ultimately help ensure that the citizens of Maine receive the best services possible as they work toward independence, employment, and a meaningful, fulfilling life. Targeted activities, among others, include: reshaping council organization and process; Creating new and better procedures for working with DBVI ; Creating and launching a new, optimally functional website; Becoming more effectively involved with the development of state plan goals and assessing the levels of success with their attainments; and, Expanding and improving the process for determining consumer satisfaction and the quality of feedback. Several other goals are named later in this report.

Additionally, we plan to increase efforts for recruiting new, effective council members and develop an improved, comprehensive application process and indoctrination program that will help get new members more quickly and comfortably up to speed.

The SRC also wants to improve and expand its connections to the blindness community this coming year by developing new ways to outreach such as modeling the very successful outreaches at several blindness gatherings that were conducted by SRC members this past year.

As the Federal and State blindness systems and regulations undergo changes the SRC needs to remain diligent in helping to maintain the effectiveness of blindness programs. We need to do all we can to preserve the integrity and the consistency of all the blindness programs that have taken so many decades to evolve. As improvements to programs and services are explored and developed we need to make sure to preserve the time tested organization and methods that now work well for the individuals who are going to need them.

Brad Strause, Chair

Maine State Rehabilitation Council for the Division for Blindness and Visual Impairment

Letter From the Director of the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

December 27, 2013

To the Citizens of Maine:

As the Director of the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI), I appreciate the opportunity to work with the DBVI State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). Furthermore, I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the contribution the SRC for DBVI has made in their vital role as the Division's partner and advisor.

Over the years the Division has relied on the Council for guidance and support in our efforts to provide blindness education and rehabilitation services, as well as vocational rehabilitation services to Maine citizens who are blind or severely visually impaired. We are particularly fortunate to have an active SRC whose membership is well versed in issues relating to blindness, and its impact on education, independence, self-sufficiency and employment. In addition, the SRC for DBVI continues to demonstrate great leadership and the ability to build collaborative partnerships with numerous groups and organizations.

The SRC continued to increase the number of active members during this past year. They have made gains in assuring that new members are more informed and better prepared to insert themselves into SRC activities once they join the Council. This past year culminated with a membership who better understand their role related to the Division's work in assisting persons who are blind to be able to participate in comprehensive blindness rehabilitation and access employment opportunities.

The Division and the Council are confronted with extraordinary challenges for the foreseeable future. There are very few who have not felt the effects of the persisting low growth in the economy and the resulting cuts in the State's revenues and funding from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. But these challenges also provide opportunities to reassess how we provide services to our consumers, and explore creative approaches to enhance and expand support for the people we serve. The ongoing number of staff vacancies that occur throughout the course of the year, and the need to provide alternative methods of delivering services beyond our typical community-based model is a particularly pressing and growing concern.

I very much look forward to an active, productive year from the SRC for DBVI, and am enthusiastic that together, we can make an even greater difference in the lives of those we serve.

John Mc Mahon, Ph.D.
Director, Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

DBVI – SRC Members and Official Seat Appointments

Brad Strause, Chair, South Portland
the Statewide Independent Living Council

Susan Fairfield, Augusta
Parent Training Network

Kathy Despres, Winthrop
Client Assistance Program

Carrie Brooker, Bangor
DBVI VR Program

Nancy Moulton, Biddeford
Catholic Charities of Maine

James Phipps, Vice-Chair, Portland
The Iris Network

Christopher Boynton, Augusta
Maine State Library-Talking Books program

Jennifer Fry, South Portland
Business, Industry, & Labor
AETNA Insurance Company

Mark Sinclair, Veazie
Business, Industry, & Labor
New England Blind Athletic Association

Michelle Mason, Togus
Disability Advocacy Group
Blinded Veteran's Association

Lynn Merrill, Treasurer, Augusta
Disability Advocacy Group
Pine Tree Guide Dog Users

Cheryl Peabody, Winslow
Disability Advocacy Group
American Council of the Blind of Maine

Kelly Osborne, Houlton
RSA 121 Native American VR Project

Cynthia Bernstein, Augusta
Maine Department of Education

John Mc Mahon, Augusta
Director of the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Walter Voitasek, Portland
Past client with a secondary disability

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Participated in the Five Council coalition and the creation of its first annual Empowerment conference.
- Continued to discuss the need for an immersion model blindness training center in Maine and continue to strongly advise creating one.
- Participated in creating a new set of policies in order to meet the requirements for an establishment project grant that would facilitate the creation of an Immersion model training center in Maine.
- Participated in creating and delivering the legislative resolve report providing a review of the practices and subsequent recommendations concerning the Business Enterprise Program in Maine.
- Participated in Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation conference in Bethesda, MD.
- Participated in an SRC national training workshop in Washington, D.C.
- Advocated with congressional delegation for rehabilitation needs of people with blindness or visual impairment.
- Analyzed results of the Client Satisfaction Survey.
- Attended two meetings of statewide blindness organizations to discuss needs of blind people in Maine.
- Continued to advocate for consumer choice to be ensured in the selection and provision of services provided by DBVI.
- Advocated with Department of Labor, legislature, and Governor regarding insufficient numbers of blindness professionals and the negative impacts on the quality of direct client services.
- Provided annual training for Council members regarding SRC roles and functions.
- Formed committees specifically targeted to assisting with developing and monitoring State Plan.
- Participated in the creation of the Employment First Maine Act and the establishing of the Employment First Maine coalition.

GOALS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014

- Hear and respond to the concerns and issues raised by blind and visually impaired Maine persons to ensure that the work of the Council is as effective as possible.
- Continue to advocate for resources to meet the needs of persons with vision impairments in Maine.
- Continue to build partnerships with visually impaired persons, employers, providers of services and advocacy groups.
- Advocate for the creation of an immersion model, blindness training center to be created in Maine.
- Create a new, improved process for measuring client satisfaction.
- Establish more effective and efficient Council work processes
- Establish closer more effective working procedures with DBVI.
- Enhance connections with, and services to, underserved people in Maine, especially Native Americans.

PLANNED INITIATIVES:

- Make recommendations to Congress and RSA regarding reauthorization of the Rehab Act.
- Participate in system of mentoring for blind citizens seeking employment or higher education.
- Recruit additional Council members from under-represented groups especially from within the business and labor community.
- Continue to measure consumer satisfaction with other than just a paper survey.
- Establish an annual presentation to legislative committees in order to raise awareness and understanding of Maine's blindness services and the needs of Maine's blind citizens.
- Monitor Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired progress toward State Plan goals as well as performance on standards and indicators.
- Create an effective, robust SRC web site.
- Assist with facilitating the satisfying of State concerns regarding the creation of an immersion model blindness training center in time to meet the deadline for a Federal establishment project grant needed for developing one.

SUMMARY OF THE SRC / DBVI CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2013

October 1, 2012 – September 30, 2013

32 surveys were received during this period

1. How would you rate our staff on courtesy and helpfulness?

Of 32 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 87.5%

Good 12.5%

2. How would you rate the promptness with which we responded?

Of 31 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 68%

Good 32%

3. How did we do in treating you as an individual?

Of 32 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 90.5%

Good 9.5 %

Please rate any of the following services you received:

A. Orientation and Mobility Instruction

Of 27 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 92%

Good 7%

B. Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (formerly Rehabilitation Teaching):

Of 27 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 97%

Good 4%

C. Low Vision Services:

Of 26 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 85%

Good/Fair 14%

D. Personal Adjustment Counseling;

Of 15 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 87%

Good 13%

E. Computer Skills:

Of 15 responses:

Excellent/Very Good 73%

Good 20%

Poor 7%

F. Job Placement:

Of 5 responses:

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Excellent/Very Good | 40% |
| Good | 40% |
| Poor | 20% |

4. Did you help choose your goal and services?

Of 23 responses with plans:

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Yes | 87% |
| Somewhat | 9% |
| No | 4% |

5. Did you achieve your goals with the help of this program?

Of 28 responses:

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Yes | 68% |
| Somewhat | 29% |
| No | 4% |

6. Were you informed of your right to appeal decisions, and of the services available from the Client Assistance Program?

Of 28 responses:

| | |
|-----|-----|
| Yes | 96% |
| No | 4% |

7. Overall, how satisfied are you with services received from the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired?

Of 31 responses:

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Delighted | 52% |
| Very Satisfied | 35% |
| Satisfied/Somewhat Satisfied | 13% |
| Not Satisfied | 0% |

Of 25 responses:

| | |
|--------|-----|
| Male | 38% |
| Female | 62% |

Of 29 responses:

Age:

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 20 – 39 | 10% |
| 40 – 59 | 45% |
| 60 – 79 | 31% |
| 80 – Up | 14% |

Additional detailed information is available on request.