

Maine SRC-DBVI

Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2013

1:00 - 4:00

Frances Perkins Conference Room
Commerce Center, Augusta

Present: John McMahon, DBVI Director; Scott Murray, SRC-DBVI Admin. Assistant; Jim Phipps, Iris Network Director; Cheryl Peabody, ACB Maine; Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Michelle Mason, Maine Healthcare System; Mark Sinclair, NEBAA; Brad Strause, AlphaOne; Jenn Fry, Aetna; Sue Fairfield, Maine Parent Federation; Cindy Bernstein, DOE

On Polycom: Walter Woitasek, prior consumer, Carrie Brooker, DBVI VR Counselor

Absent with Notice: Kelly Osborn, Lynn Merrill, Kathy Despres, Chris Boynton

Guest: Amber Mooney, Iris Network.

1. Call to Order/Introductions: Meeting called to order at 1:07 by Brad Strause, Chair, followed by introductions.

2. Old Business: *Approval of Minutes:* Walter Woitasek made motion to approve minutes from October meeting, Mark Sinclair seconded, All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

(Agenda shuffled because Nancy and Cindy need to leave early.)

A. ACB and NFB letters about move to DOE. Cheryl attempted to get rationale for move from ACB board, got no response so she asked SRC what data they think needs to be researched. John has received questions from both ACB and NFB; believes issue is more philosophical than fiscal, in terms of how blindness rehab and education is done and whether that fits better with DOE or DOL. Same question comes up every few years, looks like DOL is employment-oriented right now, not as good a fit with DBVI as it used to be--DBVI is not an employment program, we're a teaching program that does well with employment. Brad agrees there are lots of ramifications to such a move, very complex, and has to be done legislatively; as was the move 20 years ago to DOE. John assures NFB and ACB they can sponsor a bill any time they want, but requires discussions with all other stakeholders. ACB board is unsure of what kind of data is needed to support the move, which concerns SRC only if potentially negative impact. Overall, though, John feels it's not data- or functionality-driven, but rather a

philosophical decision. Brad agrees; not an SRC issue unless a case can be made. Cindy concerned that NFB/ACB should understand DOE focus--most activity is around school-age children, would DBVI adult services be maintained after moving to DOE? Cindy available to answer any questions about DOE from ACB/NFB.

Cheryl concerned that no new info forthcoming from ACB to bring to SRC, but at least they need to understand their responsibilities--it's not SRC's job to promote this. Jenn suggested they revisit why they made the change before. Brad wants to see a comprehensive list of pros and cons, if things are not that "broken" why go through the process?

Previous moves (from DHHS to DOE in '94, then to DOL in '96) reviewed, some of the previous conversations will be heard again.

(Carrie joins by phone.)

ACB supported move to DOE in 1994, but not 1996 move to DOL, which was primarily political. ACB needs to focus on current facts, rather than the disappointments of 20 years ago. Not sure why ACB is looking to the SRC to take a leadership role; it's really a consumer issue. SRC role is to monitor DBVI's administration of Title I program, so our involvement would be appropriate only if Title I program is suffering due positioning within state government. Hard to take a position based on philosophy alone when Title I compliance is actually a functional- and data-intensive issue. Title I program is the employment portion of what DBVI does. John mentioned that regs say "programs of the DSU" so there is latitude for involvements beyond VR. Brad mentioned the uniqueness of blindness services and skills training not always appearing employment-focused. Some think cuts proposed last spring might not have been proposed if DBVI were at DOE instead of DOL. DBVI is the highest general funded agency per capita in DOL and incurs the biggest hit with across-the-board cuts; move to DOE could lower impact, but not clear how much. Mark suggested DBVI not a good fit for either DOL or DOE but we've got to be somewhere, why not stay in DOL and expend that effort on other issues.

Cindy suggests ACB look at DOE website for strategic plan to see where/if adult services fit. All seem to agree that consumer groups need to make their case, then SRC can support it or not. Jim stressed importance of maintaining three components of service (children, working-age adults, older blind) in a single unit of state government because of the efficiencies involved. O&M is always the example given and it applies to all three groups. Cheryl feels she has enough info to go back and present to ACB. John reminded group that SRC's focus is set legislatively in Rehab act, and new location won't change it.

B. Establishment Project Grant Update - National data needed regarding employment stats after training; conversation with NFB's Colorado center for the

blind and Colorado's state-run training center provided access to data. John and Jim will meet this Friday to begin the process of getting the Iris Network's answers to some of the questions. Goal is to draft answers by Feb and return to Deputy Commissioner for review. Jim is confident in meeting February target. Questions and answers will be distributed to SRC after Deputy Commissioner's review.

C. Website: Technology and Braille Committee sent requests for proposal to Brant and Noonan. Brant sent proposal, Nancy read details to group. (Didn't hear back from Noonan.)

Initial development estimated at up to \$360, plus \$100 for hosting, then \$400 per year plus the cost of the domain name registration. (Maine-DBVI-SRC.org and ME-DBVI-SRC.org are available.) Not sure how long development will take, or who will actually own the site. Brant is willing to train someone to manage updates if we want, or do them himself at \$60 an hour.

Accepting the proposal means accepting the terms for 60 days. Proposal seems reasonable; could go ahead with it as is, rather than delay for revisions. Walter made a motion to "move ahead with the provision that we own it and keep it under review as the year progresses." Mark seconded. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously. Committee will contact Brant and contact Lynn when money is needed. Jim and Nancy praised Kelly's help in getting proposals.

3. Director's Report: John gave snapshot back to RSA about employment skills program, first cohort: 6 of 7 still working, second cohort: 4 of 7 working. Also published peer review article related to transition and employment a month ago. This program is getting attention across the country.

A. New initiatives: Unsuccessful closure follow-up: Regional managers will be contacting all such clients under age 65; looking at the employment and transition clients first, for fiscal 2012 and 2013. (Jim favors follow-up prior to 2012, too). Denver conference yielded discussion about how some clients become employment-ready after unsuccessful closure. Goal is, where appropriate, get them back into the program. May be able to "claim" them as successful if we provide additional blindness-related services or create some opportunity for them to advance. Jim suggested looking at adjustment counseling and see if they were ready to begin a vocational plan in the first place; we can't keep people actively receiving services if they're not making progress, and sometimes the reason for failure to progress is they haven't made it through the adjustment process; they still feel like they can't do anything.

Homemaker status, for example, offers eligibility and goal orientation that enables development of other goals as adjustment occurs; perfect example of how we teach blindness-specific ADL's first, as prerequisite to successful employment. Transition-age is getting older; research on millennials supports

this idea. We still don't use our whole system as completely as possible. Consumer-as-customer model cited, entire rehab team needs to look at the individual and the type of job they're going after so they can capitalize on relationships in social networks. We know the old Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions Club methods work well and we need to rebuild these types of personal relationships.

[Nancy and Cindy leave at 2:27]

90% of our clients have remaining vision; which is why we need to promote clinical low-vision exam to enable them to make the most of their remaining vision. Jim cited a national bill to start a demonstration project to fund prescription low-vision devices costing over \$500 (separate from AT grants). This equipment can be available through mPower loans but clients really want Medicare to purchase it.

B. Dual-Sensory Loss Population: Reaching out, with Amber's help, to 230 people with dual sensory loss who are currently in the DBVI database and who are not using the state's SSP program. Still have only a handful of people using the service because people don't know about the program or understand it.

C. Reauthorization of the Rehab Act: Anticipating Jan or Feb vote on Senate version; if the whole budget deal goes through they'll look at smaller pieces of legislation of which this is one. Talk to your senators now while they're home. CSAVR effort to change Senate's view has inadvertently reinforced what the Senate is trying to do (make the Rehab. Act and employment program instead of a rehab. program), and we could be one authorization cycle away from being defunded and losing 30-40 years of progress. Needs to be a rehabilitation program, not an employment program. Jim suggested that members of the SRC with connections at the consumer organizations encourage them to get their members to write letters.

4. Treasurer's Report: Lynn absent. No report.

5. 121 Grant Report: Kelly absent. No report.

6. CAP Report: Kathy absent. No report.

7. Committee Reports:

A. CSPD Committee: Meeting scheduled for January. DBVI day held last Friday, very highly rated; included Nick Giudice on tactile graphics, and video "Lives Worth Living," which might be good to view at the SRC annual training and is available for loan from DBVI. Excellent afternoon session on mindfulness.

John added that one person starting Master's program in rehab counseling in Virginia, funded by CSPD, has graduated. Another staff person is just about

finishing O&M program at UMass Boston. Brad suggested SRC look at pay scale issues in Maine; Jim reported previous recommendations ignored by DOE and Legislature.

John then reported on open positions, last remaining VRC position is in Portland posted--interviews by mid-January. One open O&M position in Bangor to be filled soon. Two new BRS openings for Business Relations Specialists; position started through BLN contacting entities with more than 100 employees to get foot in the door for people with disabilities.

January 7th VR counselors meeting will review recently opened opportunities, and how many DBVI clients have applied; positions fill more quickly than we can respond--need to build relationship first; did get two hired at Tambrands, though. We do have 3 Blindness Rehab. Specialist positions: Carrie, Jessica Cavanaugh (out on maternity leave) in Augusta, and Judy Wolf in Portland. Carrie and Jessica both providing direct support for parents re: blindness adjustment. Most of our students are in Portland. Funding still an issue, need another position. Transition VR work is taking all of Judy's time. Carrie works with Perkins students. While Jessica is out, we have Jeff Jones on contract to cover gaps in Augusta, Rockland, and Lewiston.

B. Steering Committee: Supposed to be working on work plan. No progress yet. Looking to Kelly for guidance because she has put together work plans for the general SRC.

C. Legislative Committee: Seeking informational presentation for Labor Committee and Appropriations so they understand DBVI. Senator Patrick suggested presentation to whole committee rather than breakfast. Jim will call clerk; should get on calendar before January and establish it as annual event.

BEP Resolve synopsis included in Director's Report sent to group. Report was constructed and sent on December 2 to Appropriations for discussion. Jim gave overview of subsequent meeting, presented recommendations about restoration of "raided" set-aside funds, allowing operators to establish separate set-aside fund, explore language of "priority" versus "preference." No members had any questions; reaction unclear, but they will devote more time in January so we will have to go back. Other recommendations need to be discussed and resolved. Utilities payment controversy continues; i.e., new DOL/DHHS building is big enough for BEP food service, but owner is making his own plans for café. However, law says "any construction directed or paid for by the State of Maine" should be made available to the BEP.

Hopefully Appropriations committee will follow the recommendations of the report. Cheryl will inform of best time for membership to contact Appropriations. Walter and Jim will connect about updating NFB about resolve report and ongoing issues.

D. Membership Committee: Kathy absent. Committee has not met; no new applications; Alex Hall contacted but no response yet. Brad reminded everyone of the urgency for recruitment because next year many are terming out. Amber Mooney and Leon Proctor suggested as possible candidates.

E. State Plan and Needs Assessment Committee: Cindy and Kathy both absent. Just met with Brenda, not enough time to answer questions. Kathy asked for 7 or 8 different types of data, will be part of the February meeting. Numbers are too small for month-to-month view to be meaningful, longitudinal data better. Brad and John then discussed how standards and indicators could be used in development of goals for the State Plan. John cautioned about maintaining role boundaries between committees. (Jim suggested attaching committee chair name to each committee on agenda.) Makes sense to have a separate committee for data collection for multiple groups, though. John mentioned that starting in January, Kelly, Cindy and Kathy will be going to DBVI staff meetings to share info about committee activities and collect data, i.e. consumer stories.

F. Consumer Satisfaction Committee: No recent meeting. Pine Tree Guide Dog Users had "Fall Fling" event in Nov. where members were asked the same questions given ACB members for the survey; committee has yet to review. John sent a cumulative report to Brad, not yet sent to whole group. 33 surveys received. Survey discussed: Is that the kind of information useful? Need more, different kinds of questions? Is it doing the job? Should consumers be surveyed during their service, too, rather than just at closure? Michelle offered to share survey sample from her office, will send to Sue.

Jim concerned that survey needs to cover more consumers than just those who closed successfully. John agreed and added that replies come mostly from people who are satisfied. Brad suggested doing annual survey.

G. Training Committee: Jim and Brad praised committee's work on fall retreat.

H. Bylaws Committee: Lynn Absent. No changes to report.

8. Miscellaneous:

A. Public Comment. Jim cited recommendation that public comment be moved to beginning of meeting. Brad suggested both beginning and end to elicit commentary as reactions occur. John cautioned that public comment needs a time limit. Walter made motion to "have the February 19th meeting have a 15-minute public comment period at the beginning of the meeting and a 15-minute comment period at the end of meeting and that the Chair see that no one speaks more than three minutes during any individual comment during that time period." Discussion ensued about how to limit the time allotment. Motion not seconded; and so died.

Jenn made new motion: "To include a public comment at the beginning and at the end of the meeting, limited to three minutes per person." Seconded by Walter. Brad suggested the chair should have discretion to time limits. Jim also suggested public comment should follow agenda, but should be managed by chair so essential Council business gets done. Brad led the vote: all in favor; motion carried unanimously.

Walter then asked about survey results from the fall SRC retreat. Carrie not available to respond to Walter's question, but Scott reported receiving two replies, which he forwarded to Carrie. Will revisit this topic at Feb meeting.

John cautioned that we need to resume email exchanges/reviews between meetings to keep communication going while items are fresh in peoples' minds. John also reminded the group that Carrie is not a voting member.

Public Comment: At Jim's invitation, Amber then asked about counting a consumer twice if their case is re-opened for fine-tuning. John clarified that a successful closure can be re-opened within three years in "post-employment," but it is not counted again, although RSA used to count that as a half. John cited Amber's unique perspective as previous consumer, and Brad suggested annually having a panel of volunteer consumers to create direct contact with the Council as is supposed to happen at June public hearing for State Plan. We need to encourage better public participation (maybe with food or transportation?), could target different regions; Jim cited good turnout at Presque Isle forum in response to problem in school-age children's services, but it shouldn't take a crisis to get people's attention.

Cheryl offered lunch-time meeting on behalf of ACB. John favors face-to-face satisfaction info-gathering, is willing to work on assigning the staff to put it together. Brad favors having Consumer Satisfaction Committee work on it.

9. Adjournment: Mark made motion to adjourn. Jenn seconded. All in favor; meeting adjourned at 4:05.