

**Maine SRC-DBVI
Meeting Minutes
February 19, 2014
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; Michelle Mason, VA Healthcare System/Blinded Veterans Advocacy; Mark Sinclair, NEBAA; Brad Strause, AlphaOne/SILC; Jenn Fry, Aetna; Sue Fairfield, Maine Parent Federation; Cindy Bernstein, DOE; Chris Boynton, Maine State Library

On Polycom: Kelly Osborn, Wabanaki VR; Walter Woitasek, prior consumer, Carrie Brooker, DBVI-VR; Lynn Merrill, PTGDU

Absent with Notice: Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Kathy Despres, C.A.R.E.S.

1. Call to Order/Introductions: Meeting called to order at 12:57 by Brad Strause, Chair, followed by introductions.

2. Public Comment: None.

3. Approval of Minutes: Mark Sinclair made motion to approve minutes from December meeting, Jim Phipps seconded. No discussion. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Rehab Center Grant Update: (John) Gathering data requested by the Commissioner's office in conjunction with Jim Phipps; each has separate set of questions. Goal is to send to the commissioner by middle of next week. SRC will get copies after commissioner's initial review (which will likely generate new set of questions for clarification) Brad favors prompt SRC involvement to avoid missing deadline and early SRC input to demonstrate intensity of SRC's interest. Any questions from SRC should funnel through Brad. Commissioner has been responsive to SRC questions in the past. Submission goes first to Deputy Commissioner, then Commissioner's office, then Governor, with approvals along the way; their priority seems to be determining if the investment in the center is going to have an adequate return, demonstrated in increased closures (most centers don't track this). Jim cited that some centers feel they are getting referred the most challenging clients to place, hence lower closure numbers, so John's data is encouraging. John cited Texas' revamping (and shortening) their

program in response to low closure rate. No data available on post-closure time period assessed, but Brad thinks a year or two might not be enough.

5. BEP Issue Update: Appropriations was going to be looking at the OPM budget recommendation. John has heard nothing since initial presentation, attended by Brad, Jim Phipps and Mel Clarridge. Jim added that in January OPM reported on its 100-page report, but nobody was there to testify on the page that said the statute should be repealed. Jim reminded the committee they need to hear the BEP report (that they requested) before making any recommendations. So no action was taken and Jim McManus hasn't heard anything. Hopefully no news is good news.

6. New Business:

A. Scheduling: Jen requested date change for December meeting and earlier notice of dates of October training (dates already chosen: 10/28-29, but could change, depending on venue (Training Committee will select venue soon, has prospect in Bath)) Could resend survey to get more feedback, (only 2 or 3 surveys came back last fall)

Walter made motion to move the December meeting to 12/3. Kelly seconded. Discussion: Jim Phipps expressed concern about timing with year-end tasks. Vote taken. All in favor except Jim. Motion carried.

7. Director's Report (John): Next offering of the employability skills workshop will be first week of November (11/2-11/7), right after SRC annual training, location TBA depending on where clients are coming from. Looking for presenters; Carrie may recruit SRC members (Brad has gone twice.) Public outreach is a big component, especially minority cultures. Many don't know that Maine has blindness services. Outreach scaled back as our focus turned to VRT/O&M, now we need to return focus to outreach. We are asking our regions/partner agencies to map out prospective outreach recipients so efforts can be coordinated. SRC needs to be more involved in town-meeting-type activities--Brad is interested. John will create "master table" and send to SRC. Also looking at systemic changes, i.e. with home healthcare and area agencies on aging (AAA's). Reviewing Michelle's pre-screening instrument for that. Although AAA's are typically familiar with blindness services, they have had turnover, too, so more training is needed. Brad cited previous discussion about holding annual consumer panel discussions, could invite them to SRC meeting.

BEP News: Washington County Community College (WCCC) "fell into our lap;" vending project following apprenticeship model: WCCC business student in training, seeking to start his own business; working out very well. Other site is

Portland DOL/DHHS (outer Congress St.), will house 500-600 people, looks like we're going to be able to put a self-serve marketplace operation. Jim McManus has been working on that.

Promotional Video: Proposed draft text available, final version pending. Some of the "word-smithing" seems very simple but subtle differences need to be clear: DBVI transition services start at age 14, versus DVR's two years before graduation. Our interpretation of Rehab Act focuses on independence and community inclusion, part of which is employment. DVR looks more strongly at employment before you get to independence and community integration. We're looking for language that will effectively describe what is public VR in Maine and we want to emphasize importance of blindness IL and make sure all three categories are addressed: DVR, DBVI, and 121 Grant (Native American VR), although Kelly reports the tribe is not interested.

TACE (funded by RSA) is under budget so they can cover more of the cost (maybe all of it). Members urged to get comments in now, because TACE is now reworking the text and then within two weeks it will be back to us to run through the Department of Labor communications person to approve. After that there won't be additional opportunity to alter the narrative.

Jim cited urgency of clarifying the difference between DBVI and general VR: DBVI's rehab includes primary rehabilitation, whereas the healthcare community provides that element in the rest of the VR system, a distinction that needs to be very clear: DBVI clients need to know that they can come to DBVI for primary vision rehabilitation, that that is DBVI's top priority; job readiness skills are also important, but secondary to that; the unmet need is primary vision rehab. Brad agrees that point needs reinforcing, with general public, too. This effort is first in a long time. Goal is 2-3 minute teaser video, then option to see stories. Trying to keep it brief so people won't tune it out.

Budget: More federal funding lost: \$50,000 (in addition to funds lost through sequestration.) Will look at tightening up; goal is balanced reductions in instructional services or client equipment purchases. Monies for staff time already around \$200K less than last year so further reduction could have a big impact, we need to make sure alternative resources are being tapped when possible. Also need a way to make sure clients are taking advantage of scholarships, but we can't mandate that students apply. Dick Bennett memorial scholarship didn't get claimed last year. (\$1500) Jim feels this should be part of the student's plan that they work with the RC on going after potential sources of funding; even if we can't make them do it, it can be woven into the academics. Adaptive equipment loan program is also being underutilized. John cited cycle in SSA's PASS plan, where it gets overutilized and SS tweaks the system and then it gets underutilized. Case managers need to be aware of this, too.

Split-Coding: Last budgetary item is particularly perplexing and complicated. In the mid-90s the blindness community created the DBVI as a separate designated unit. RSA would send VR funds to the state, which decided how to split funds, based on previous year spending (split-coding was not allowed at that time).

Now, positions split between DBVI and DVR may need to have percentages modified to reflect current conditions and take advantage of split-coding. We need to figure out which parts of which positions DBVI is already paying for and which ones we need to pay more for. We have the documentation to support any modifications, but the split to two DSU's made in the same state is an agreed-upon percentage. Any proposal for increase will require us to come up with more money, but we actually have less. Original split was based on money in the Title I VR program, but didn't include things like general allotment fund, CAP, IL services, centers, etc. 18.5% is the average percentage across the country; range is 13% to 22%, so we are ok, just need to make sure the share we're paying is fair. Jim favors more frequent recalculations. John will keep SRC informed.

8. Treasurers Report (Lynn): Four line items used so far:

1. Support staff - higher than anticipated (due to BEP workgroup transcription needs.) \$1,191 disbursed of \$2000 allotted. May need to move funds from other lines if bylaws allow.
2. Travel/lodging/meals - \$145 invoice left over from last year, came out of the \$3350 allotted for this year.
3. Annual training - \$5,000 budgeted and the training was \$4,754.
4. Travel reimbursement: \$198.94 of \$650 budgeted.

Jim then asked about fund transfers from unused line items. Lynn deferred to John, who cited instances of transfers last year. John will have Brenda contact Syntiro. Lynn will send John a reminder e-mail. Jim reinforced the appropriateness for the SRC to pay for Scott's transcription work for the BEP workgroup sessions.

9. 121 Grant (Kelly): On track to meet goals for serving consumers; currently in 6th year (one-year extension) and the tribe is unsure if they want to reapply. Jim offered support from SRC as outreach to underserved populations is a priority. Kelly will keep group updated.

CAP: No report, Kathy Despres is on vacation. Nancy Moulton also.

Committee Reports:

CSPD: Meets quarterly, next meeting May 16th.

Accessibility and Technology: (includes Nancy, Chris, Brad (web site assistance)) Chris reported selection of domain name (MAINE-DVBI-SRC.ORG); Google searchability is highest priority. Brandt will set up "organizational" e-mail for consistency regardless of turnover. Once this web site is done, Brad will be working on parallel kind of project with the SILC.

Discussion ensued about functions web site needs to provide: New member packets, agendas, committee membership lists, audio files of meetings, upcoming and past agendas, minutes, legislative alerts, we could also offer a signup page for people to register for updates, links to different programs, SRC-related outreach and information, single source for procedural documents, bylaws, resources. Group urged to submit input.

Steering Committee: Kelly to be in Portland soon and will meet with Brad on preliminary work plan--should be done at start of fiscal year, but hasn't. Need to create a template and process, for use in coming years. Eventual goal is for each committee to have a mini work plan, like DVR and the SILC are already doing.

Jim reported on January discussion about student referrals to VR and how it came out at January's Employment First Main (EFM) meeting that Catholic charities has not been referring the students for VR services, despite the default favoring referrals. Discussion centered on idea that no state agency or state contractor should be making a decision on behalf of a client or client's parent or guardian about whether a VR referral is appropriate. DBVI should be allowed to determine eligibility. Parent or guardian should be informed of the option, even if they then choose to opt out. The default now is you have to opt in, where it should be to have to opt out. The problem is that they're not getting the option unless somebody identifies real employment potential, which is not often considered when students are 12 years old. Jim wants to ensure this gets addressed. Brad suggested automatically including VR counseling absent parent opting out.

Cindy cited school's perspective: kids start transition services in 9th grade, though they can start as young as 12, line is still blurry, but IEP teams should be educated about VR and connection to DBVI. Cindy will look into initiating this, but the process of including outside agencies is complicated because of written parental consent requirements (can be difficult to obtain and timing is crucial and tricky. Consent must be obtained separately for each visit)

John clarified that as long as the student is in school, he or she entitled to a transition plan as part of the IEP; but VR is an eligibility program, not an entitlement program. But it's the informational capacity: anyone can apply. Those we know about are aware, but those we don't know will qualify, they still have the right to know about VR and that is why we have Carrie and Jessica Cavanaugh and Judy Wolf to keep parents informed about VR and how to apply, will take time to catch up.

Cindy added that while it sounds logical that VR service should be an opt-out, that's not the mandate of schools. It is the IEP team's determination to invite outside agencies. Outside of that, though is this opportunity you're describing at Catholic Charities, to inform all of their clients about DVR and DBVI and once you are connected, the parents can invite anyone they want--it's a much stronger process, but requires educating the parents. (Cindy will be going with Carrie to Region 4 team meeting in April.)

Jim cited very confusing discussion about this at Employment First Maine (EFM) meeting. Brad favors making teachers and providers and parents aware of VR and let them decide to apply or not. John cited segment of students with multiple disabilities who won't qualify for VR, but their parents still need to know that VR is available.

(Sue leaves meeting at 2:50)

Legislative Committee: (Brad) Gave 40-minute presentation to Labor Committee, included Q&A period, well received. Began with Brad's overview of VR services available at DBVI, how SRC works with DBVI on the VR program, description of DBVI services outside Title I. Nancy then talked about educational services and preparing children for employment, followed by Jim's information about vision rehabilitation and how primary rehab through the blindness system is really the only shot people get at rehabilitation because the healthcare system doesn't do it. We want to make sure we get in there in January of 2015 and do the same thing again because the cast of characters on that committee will be different, but historically they have been very supportive of blindness services, and we want to maintain that.

Membership Committee: Kathy has sent out information to three prospects, Shannon Burns, Patty Sarchi and Alex Hall, status uncertain. Amber Mooney contacted, too. Serious attrition at the end year, need to increase recruitment efforts and do earlier mentorship. Membership committee needs to be better defined. Walter queried about NFB prospects, no applications submitted yet. Walter will follow up on that.

Data Collection Committee: Confusion exists about whether this is needed. Kelly reported meeting with Brenda at DBVI about statistics, but not since she has been out on medical leave, will catch up with Brenda and get back to Brad.

Consumer Satisfaction Committee: Nothing to report. Brad and Kelly will talk about that when they get together.

State Plan/Needs Assessment: Cindy confirmed with Kathy--all goals addressed in meeting with Brenda. Will meet again prior to April SRC meeting. Cindy reported Kathy went to VR staff meeting in Augusta, well received. Kelly will connect with Bangor VR staff. Brad cited complexity in number of tasks, developing goals, evaluating DBVI, data and needs assessment speaks to that, offered SRC support to DBVI staff.

Bylaws Committee: Discussion around whether standing committee is needed or not; it's only active when SRC gives it a task, could be ad hoc. John disagrees, clarified the need for standing committee. Lynn has been bylaws person so far.

Brad then cited upcoming CSAVR conference in April. Walter moved to "authorize Brad Strause's attendance at the spring CSAVR conference in Bethesda" Jim Phipps seconded. No discussion. All in favor. None opposed. Motion carried unanimously.

Public comment: Second public comment period opened and closed without input.

Miscellaneous:

Next meeting: April 16, third Wednesday. Room has been reserved.

Announcement: Mark cited Kennebec Journal article about Lindsay Ball, who won silver medal as member of Para-Olympic ski team, will be going to Sochi. Posted to blind forum, too. Jim suggested this should be part of the video of what can happen as a result of sports camp.

Jim then requested permission to reopen Legislative Committee discussion, (Chair granted) regarding federal level matters for SRC to be aware of:

1. HR4040--Anne Sullivan Macy Act, which is combined effort of advocacy groups to get the expanded core curriculum mandated as part of federal special education law and also obtain funding for expanded core curriculum services. That effort has been combined with a similar effort related to deaf students and is now been introduced in Congress and the House of Representatives and there's an interest in getting Congressmen and women to co-sponsor the legislation, which is highly beneficial--Needs to be introduced in Senate and go

through long process. Jim will get info to SRC and encouraged them to contact Pingree and Michaud to sponsor the bill.

2. Minimum wage rules changes related to government contracts. Executive order signed which will increase to \$10.10, and also requires AbilityOne program to comply, potentially a huge step. Unclear what it means for the agency running those programs. No AbilityOne programs in Maine, though Iris network used to do that, would be worthwhile looking at restarting. John concerned that if we just say, "pay everyone 10.10" but don't fund the contracts it will dry up. Normal minimum wage is \$7.50 but a lot of federal contracts paying less than that. We'll watch it pretty closely. Walter cited cases where even people with degrees still earning sub-minimum wage.

Adjournment: Mark Sinclair made motion to adjourn. Walter seconded. No discussion, all in favor. Motion carried unanimously, meeting adjourned at 3:28.