

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Director's Report
January 21, 2015

I. Staffing:

a. Vacancies:

- i. Orientation & Mobility Instructor in the Bangor office. This position became vacant in early November. Recruiting through contacting various university personnel preparation programs and professional O&M organizations continue.

b. New Hires:

- i. VR Counselor. Debra McIntyre has been hired as our newest VR Counselor and will be working in the Bangor office. Ms. McIntyre has worked in disability services at Husson University in past years. She will begin work with DBVI on Jan. 20.

II. Employability Skills Program (ESP):

The Job Club portion of the ESP meets telephonically every Tuesday afternoon. All participants have identified a pathway to get the blindness-specific training and other upskilling needed to lead toward employment. This Job Club will continue to meet for up to six months following the completion of the on-site component of the ESP back in November.

III. Budget:

The initiative that sought funding for adding two more Teacher of Visually Impaired Children (TVI) positions and related costs that was included in the Department of Labor's budget request did not make it into the Governor's budget that was submitted to the legislature last Friday. The DBVI Director will be meeting with the DOL Commissioner and officials within DOE to determine what steps, if any, can be taken to obtain the funding needed for the positions and/or salary increase for contracted blindness professionals that is essential for recruitment and retention of instructional staff.

IV. Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:

Karen Wolffe, Ph. D., was in Maine in mid-November conducting public forums, staff discussions, and RSA data review s part of our required Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).

- A. Four public forums were held; one during the day in Bangor, Augusta, and Portland, and one evening session held in Portland.

In addition, each forum was available via teleconferencing. We had approximately 15 participants attend the forums in person, with around another dozen joining in via the conference call. Although Dr. Wolffe is currently conducting the analysis of the information gathered during these forums, the one thing she noted is that participants at each of the forums commented on the lack of opportunity provided by DBVI for them to have contact with other persons who are blind or visually impaired. There appears to be a bit of a disconnect between DBVI staff and the blindness community in Maine at this time.

- B. Dr. Wolffe has spent the majority of her time in December making telephone survey calls to open clients from federal fiscal year 2014, as well as successfully and unsuccessfully closed clients from 2012, 2013, and 2014. To date she has surveyed all 14 participants of our first two ESP cohorts, approximately 25 transition-aged clients, and a mixture of around 60 other client types. We have somewhere in the neighborhood of 90 completed telephone surveys. She will be sending large print surveys to individuals who she has telephone numerous times without being able to reach the client.
- C. We still are working out the pathway to survey eye doctors across Maine.

V. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act/Rehabilitation Act:

We continue to learn more exact details of the major changes in the reauthorization of the Rehab. Act (Chapter IV of WIOA). Representative of the four major programs covered under WIOA (Rehab., Workforce Development, Adult Education, and Employment Services) have begun holding regular meetings to learn about each other's programs, as well as to figure out how to make the required linkages between these four major programs. RSA continues to work on the regulations for the Act. The draft regulations were expected out by around this time, but the U.S. DOL and DOE are reporting the draft regulations will be out in April.

VI. Vocational Rehab. and Training Center:

DBVI Director has assembled both the Steering and Planning Committees to begin work on building the program that will be housed in the training center facility at the Iris Network. The Steering committee, which will outline the core components of what clients will need to gain from attending this center, as well as fleshing out the vision of the center, will begin its work on January 25. This small group of individuals should be able to wrap up their work in three meetings.

The Planning Committee will consist of any of the members of the Steering Committee and an additional six to eight other individuals. These folks are those who will be creating the actual programming that will support the vision created by the Steering Committee, and figure out how to mesh the program into the physical space at the Iris Network. The work of this group is not to simply replicate what other center programs are doing, but rather to create the program that fits our needs in Maine. In addition, the Planning Committee will also be tasked with recommending various staff from across our entire blindness system who we can invite to play a role in the on-site program. The Planning Committee will begin their work on February 25.

- VII. Administrative Hearings Officers: For many years this service has been provided by hearings officers within the Dept. of Health & Human Services (DHHS). We have been notified by DHHS that they will no longer be able to provide this service to the Bureau of Rehab. Services beyond the end of January. We are currently pursuing other options for securing this service from within DOL, as well as from other state departments.
- VIII. New Initiatives:
- A. Deaf-blind and dual sensory impaired outreach. This initiative will build on the work we have already completed in southern Maine as it relates to the creation of a Support Service Provider (SSP) program. In addition to doing statewide outreach to identify more consumers that could benefit from DBVI services, we will also be recruiting across the state for persons interested in becoming an SSP. This initiative should begin by mid-February.
 - B. Identification of adults with intellectual disabilities who have vision impairment. DBVI Director has been working with Dr. Romy Spitz and staff from the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) to secure funding to develop a vision impairment prescreening tool that can be used effectively with this population. In addition to developing the instrument, training caregiver staff in how to implement the tool will also be done. The plan is to use the DBVI Low Vision Consultant to create this tool and provide the training.
 - C. Outreach to older residents with vision impairments. DBVI Director has met with the director of aging services at OADS, and the Blindness Rehab. Outreach Specialist at the V.A. to explore the use of a functional vision impairment prescreening tool at senior meal sites and with Meals on Wheels workers. This effort will have DBVI and other blindness system staff providing training in the use of this tool to Maine's aging system.

- D. Training on how to build accessible documents. DBVI Director and BRS ADA Coordinator Eric Dibner are working on a plan to create an interactive training on how to build an accessible document. The training, which is being created for staff of DOL, will be a hands-on training, possibly using an interactive webinar format. This might be a great connection for the SRC's Technology Committee.

- IX. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD): Although the 2014 amendments of the Rehab. Act do not call for a coordinated system for providing staff training, DBVI still believes this type of systemic approach is essential. DBVI Training Coordinator, Andrea Bickford, will be convening DBVI's CSPD group and polling staff on their training needs. Since there will be no federal funds dedicated specifically for training, funding will come out of existing DBVI funds.

Respectfully Submitted by
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DBVI Director