

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2013

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sandra Edwards
Bill Johnson
Basil Julian
Irma Nelson
Terry Sheeler
Dickie Walker

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron
Larry Dickerson
Jim Hill

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Teresa Doan

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Harold Brewer
AER Representative (Vacant)

DHS Representative: Keesa Smith

Attorney General's Office Representative: KaTina Hodge

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Tony Brown, Kandy Cayce, Mary Douglas, Lilian Felicitas, Lisa Fore, Rhonda Garmon, Linda Haynes, Christy Lamas, Mona Mason, Ginny McWilliams, Katy Morris, Debra Newton, Jim Pearson, Lou Talley, Coral Virden, Cassandra Williams

Note: The remainder of the DSB staff were in attendance to observe the board meeting as the closing portion of the statewide meeting and join the board in recognizing DSB consumers and employers of the year and their fellow staff members.

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Mrs. Terry Sheeler called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA. Motion was made by Mr. Dickie Walker to approve the agenda. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

APPROVAL OF 09/13/13 MINUTES. Motion was made by Dickie Walker to approve the September 13, 2013 minutes. Mr. Bill Johnson seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT

This is the 30th anniversary of the DHS Division of Services for the Blind. In the celebration to be held following this board meeting, we will observe that anniversary and the board will celebrate by recognizing the success of both DSB consumers and staff members. We will be applauding the success of selected consumers and staff at that ceremony, but we are all part of the same team, and when one of us succeeds, be it consumer or staff, we all succeed.

NATIONAL ISSUES:

SB1356 – Like Arkansas, Washington, D.C. has been shut down by the weather. Congress is still grappling with SB1356, the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, which, in its current wording, would move federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to the Department of Labor. Various members of Congress are trying to prevent that from happening. My latest word from people like former RSA Commissioner Dr. Fred Schroeder, is that the transfer is probably not going to happen. There are many groups discussing the bill with Congress right now: National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation and the various independent living groups. The proposed plan would create a new Independent Living Administration (ILA) within DHHS similar to the Rehabilitation Services Administration within Labor, and would move the Older Blind Program to ILA. If this comes about, it would make DSB subject to two differing sets of federal regulations. The word right now is that there is a good chance that Older Blind will be retained within the Rehabilitation Services Administration even if RSA is moved to Labor. Changes at the federal level do not necessarily dictate a similar change at the state level. If a transfer to Labor (Workforce Services-at the state level) were deemed advantageous to Arkansas, such a change would require state legislation and take perhaps three to five years to bring about. Time will tell whether the Arkansas General Assembly considers this a good fit for Arkansas if, indeed, it happens at the federal level.

Federal Budget – The House did pass the federal budget bill. It remains to be seen whether the heavy impact of sequestration we were expecting is lessened any on the second or third hit.

STATE:

Partnerships – We continue our partnership efforts with World Services for the Blind, Lighthouse for the Blind, School for the Blind and other organizations concerned with blindness issues to enable Arkansas as a whole to better serve all ages of persons who have significant vision problems. I know that ASBVI Superintendent Jim Hill will be here later on. He is delayed in a meeting right now with Education.

DSB:

Field Administrator Christy Lamas reported on recent Field activities. **Annual Rate of Rehabilitation.** Christy noted that, for the program year ending September 30th, DSB saw an increase in the total number of successful outcomes for consumers. She added that DSB is moving toward employing **rehabilitation interns** this coming program year

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which will benefit the interns through experience, as well as support the counselors and vocational rehabilitation teachers in assisting consumers to reach their vocational goals. The interns will be placed across the state.

DSB is also working with World Services for the Blind on a **transportation project** that will be getting started in the next several months. We are looking to find vendors throughout the state that can be dedicated transportation providers for DSB clients. That is the number one issue in rural Arkansas...how to get to work. DSB will also be converting to its new **AWARE** client database this year. The DSB initial Parent Summit last summer in Little Rock was a success, and DSB will be expanding **Parent Summits** into the West Memphis and Jonesboro area this spring as well as into the Fayetteville area later on in the year. This is a joint activity with Educational Services for the Visually Impaired (ESVI) and with school district personnel. We hold the summits so the parents and the students can sit down with us and learn what their options are, what DSB does, and what other agencies can do to assist them.

Karen Wolffe Seminar. Yesterday during the Field Services Statewide Meeting attended by DSB staff and many partner agency personnel, Dr. Karen Wolffe gave a one day seminar on employment of persons with significant disabilities in addition to blindness. We will be following up with Dr. Dickerson and World Services for the Blind on how **as a team** we will be able to apply some of the techniques that Dr. Wolffe shared. I liked the good partnership demonstrated amongst the consumers themselves. I liked the map that she presented on getting someone from the dream to the reality. I think everybody would agree that the presentation from Dr. Wolffe yesterday was very effective and something that we could certainly use as a pattern. There was a lot that we learned from her, and as she said, we can customize it for Arkansas.

Assistive Technology Training – The first class of DSB rehab teachers has completed training at this stage to be Assistive Technology Instructors. Training will start up again in February for new hires and any remaining staff needing the training. Dr. Dickerson spoke about WSB involvement in the ATI initiative, noting that WSB has two staff members on the national committee to develop the standards and processes for ATI **certification**. The committee is supposed to have a meeting in early January and a site meeting in early spring, but they are just beginning to discuss the issues. It is probably going to take two years before they actually have a process in place. In the meantime DSB rehab teachers will have already been formally trained so when the national certification comes into being they will already qualify, because the curriculum had already been discussed with AER before we ever entered into this. RSA is watching to see how it works for DSB and so is WSB.

Older Blind – Katy Morris noted that the DSB Board met in a called meeting October 29 to consider how to increase funding and services for the Older Individuals Who are Blind (OIB) program. The Board agreed to seek \$300,000 in additional general revenue within the DSB 2015 budget request. This funding would be earmarked specifically for OIB to

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address the growing waiting list. The OIB program is grossly underfunded nationwide. DSB contracts with World Services for the Blind to administer the Older Blind program across Arkansas and the funding request is identified for that purpose. The legislative session will kick off February 10, 2014.

VR Program – The DSB Vocational Rehabilitation program is in good shape. We received permission to spend the incentive funds that DSB earned last year and was awarded recently. We have earned \$2.1 million dollars, because staff were able to work with consumers to result in successful rehabilitation, and at the same time, complied with federal rules on documentation. It takes both the performance and the accountability to qualify for the incentive funding. You may have read recent news reports about an audit of Colorado Rehabilitation Services that uncovered many compliance issues and multiple questionable uses of rehab funds over a 32-year period. According to the feds and state auditors, DSB doesn't have this problem. In my opinion, this is due largely to the fact that virtually every one of our staff recognizes the need for compliance and accountability.

Business and Technology Program (B&T) – Administrator Jim Pearson reported that the **DSB vending facility** that opened at the Veterans Administration in Fayetteville is doing well. A DSB vending facility in Little Rock at the Federal Courthouse is due to open the end of January or first of February. World Services for the Blind has also contacted DSB about a vending opportunity as an annex to one of the existing facilities, and Tom Bradford, manager at the One Capitol Mall vending facility, has accepted the assignment to that facility. As soon as we receive the vending machines, we will be ready to start the WSB services as well. **Data Management** – Jim noted that, in preparation for the implementation of the new AWARE client data system April 1, DSB has replaced staff computers.

Social Security Reimbursements – Katy Morris mentioned that it should be noted that DSB has received a little over \$80,000 dollars in Social Security reimbursements so far this fiscal year.

AWARE Update – Assistant Director Cassondra Williams reported that DSB is in negotiation together with the DHS Office of Systems of Technology to work out some of the labor and scheduling issues that we have encountered regarding the AWARE client data system contract with Alliance. Database Administrator Feona Barnett and Statistician Jim McCune are looking at how long it will take us to complete the needed tasks. We are looking to go live with AWARE April 1. We need to get the remaining tasks identified and the plan confirmed with our DHS Contract section, and will be able to give you more information.

Katy added that the AWARE initiative is working because of the efforts of so many people in this room, because DSB did not approach this plan from the top down. Feona reached out to many people who are in this room to be testers or super users. Kena Sabb Tucker will be the hub through which all this information pours and she will do a lot of quality control as to what actually goes into the system and is ultimately paid. Amy

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Jackson from the Jonesboro office and Sherrie Walston-Friday from the Texarkana office are also super users. We built this from the ground up, so that the people who were really going to have to be using this would thoroughly understand it and could train others. We met at Mt. Magazine to train, because it was relatively centrally located. When we do go live with AWARE, we are going to have people spread all over the state that can help staff if they get into a problem and it won't be such a tough process by then or such a long adjustment to get it operational. I cannot say enough about the AWARE team at every level. We also have had benefit of the long hours of the steering committee: Feona Barnett, Jimmy McCune, Cassondra Williams, and Christy Lamas. Time will tell how successful this is, but it is looking really good. When they came to Mt. Magazine, the staff did not come in with a negative attitude or complaining. They came committed to make it work.

Results of Consumer Meeting Notices - ACB representative Sandra Edwards said Erika Evans of Sherwood has joined ACB as a result of receiving the notice and has been very active on the convention committee this year. There have been others who responded to the state meeting announcements by Counselors, but they are not as active and are out in the state. There is one potential member in Hot Springs. NFB representative and board Chair Terry Sheeler stated that all of us working together to share information about the consumer groups or any organization that helps the blind is always worth it.

Mrs. Morris explained that the barrier was that state agencies are not allowed to be the conduit for simply sending information out from the consumer groups. However, DSB is certainly supportive of the efforts of the groups and wants to expand the knowledge and awareness of consumers that the consumer groups exist and how to access them. Right now our solution is to have the local offices notify their caseloads about the two consumer groups twice a year. So in the spring you will see the counselors, RT's and Rehab Techs sending out information about ACB and NFB and the importance of consumers participating in consumer groups five or six weeks before the ACB convention. The same happens in the fall just before the NFB convention.

END OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

APPOINTMENTS TO 2014 STANDING COMMITTEES:

<u>Legislative Issues Committee:</u>	Sandra Edwards, Jim Hill, Larry Dickerson
<u>Budget Committee:</u>	Dickie Walker, Irma Nelson, Harold Brewer
<u>Constitution and Bylaws Committee:</u>	Bill Johnson, Kara Aaron, Teresa Doan

MAPPING OF 2015 STATE PLAN – Christy Lamas reported that for FFY 2015 we have three goals: DSB will increase the employment opportunities for people who are blind or severely visually impaired; DSB will increase its services to transition students; and DSB will expand its outreach efforts to include the general public, as well as the unserved, underserved, minorities, and stakeholders. The public forum will be held in March, and strategies for how we are going to reach these goals will be developed.

Dickie Walker made a motion to approve the mapping of the 2015 State Plan. Bill Johnson seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER (DRC) REPORT – No representative was present. No report was submitted.

ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (AILC) REPORT – No representative was present. A report was submitted with the board packet.

CONSUMER INPUT:

American Council of the Blind – Quasar Chapter in Little Rock will have their Christmas Party tomorrow. The state convention is April 25-26 at the Hilton Garden Inn in North Little Rock. The keynote speaker this year is Chris Gray, Executive Director of the Missouri Council of the Blind and past president of the national ACB.

Veterans Administration – June Richardson, Low Vision Specialist at the Little Rock VA, has retired for medical reasons. It is unsure when the position will be filled.

National Federation of the Blind – The NFB national convention will be held July 1-6, in Orlando, Florida. The state NFB convention will be held October 3-5, in Hot Springs at Comfort Suites. The application deadline for NFB scholarships is March 31. NFB has a chapter at large that meets monthly via the telephone. It is good for people who live out in the rural areas. Donna Walker or Terry Sheeler can provide anyone who's interested with the telephone number and access code.

World Services for the Blind – Dr. Dickerson announced that WSB has become a technology vendor for adults who are deaf blind in Arkansas through Helen Keller International. There is no upward age limit. The program has just started and there are funds available. This is part of the 21st Century Communication Act to make technology accessible to the visually impaired.

SCHEDULE OF NEXT MEETING – March 14, 2014, at 1 p.m., at the Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, 1st Floor, Conference Room A.

The meeting was adjourned to the Recognition Luncheon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards
Secretary