

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2011

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Gerald Carr  
Teresa Doan  
Sandra Edwards  
Irma Nelson  
Dickie Walker

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron  
Larry Dickerson  
James Gatewood

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Gary Hall  
Angyln Young

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Jim Hill  
AER Vacant

DHS Representative: Steve Jones

Attorney General's Office Representative: Erika Gee

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Tony Brown, Mary Cabaniss, Charlie Cain-Davis, Kandy Cayce, Rhonda Garmon, Linda Haynes, Robert Lamb, Mona Mason, Katy Morris, Jim Pearson, Judith Renick, Tina Shelby, Lou Talley, Jessie Thomas, Coral Virden, Donna Walker, Cassandra Williams

***CALL TO ORDER.*** Chairman Mr. Gerald Carr 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 09/09/11 MINUTES.*** Motion was made by Mr. Dickie Walker to approve the minutes. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

***INTRODUCTIONS.*** All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

## **DSB DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Mrs. Teresa Doan, Special Education Supervisor at the School for the Blind, was introduced as a new DSB Board Member, representing the school. DSB welcomes new staff members: Mary Qualls, Rehabilitation Assistant in Batesville, and Kimela Lowery, Rehabilitation Assistant in El Dorado. We bid goodbye to Francine Crain, Administrative Specialist III in the Little Rock office, who retired in October, and to VR Counselor Tonya Wear of the West Memphis office, and Rehab Teacher Bob Connell of the Pine Bluff Office who will be retiring in January.

### **NATIONAL ISSUES:**

Bills Filed in Response to GAO Report to Congress – Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), is tracking HR 2295, 3610 and 3611, all filed in response to the GAO report, contending there are 47 federal job programs that duplicate services across federal funding streams. Fred Schroeder, former RSA Commissioner, and current Policy Consultant for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), is keeping member agencies apprised of the movement of the bills.

Budget Control Act – The super committee for deficit reduction did not produce the results required by law, so automatic cuts may take effect, and agencies are preparing for the impact. DSB has been operating from a very conservative standpoint for several years and hopefully will continue to be in a strong financial situation in Vocational Rehabilitation.

HR 3086 – The National Federation of the Blind has submitted HR 3086 Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities, in objection to the continuation of the subminimum wage for persons with disabilities. NCSAB has signed on in support of HR 3086, along with other similar groups supporting the independence of persons with disabilities.

Other Federal Proposals – Discussion is underway to aim for a 7% level of federal employment for persons with disabilities. Congress is also looking at continuing unemployment insurance payments and a 4.2 % payroll tax for a year. There is also a move to block the proposed 27% cut in Medicare physicians' reimbursements.

### **STATE ISSUES:**

NFB – The NFB state convention was held in Fayetteville in October and offered an exceptional agenda this year. It was good that DSB had many staff members present, giving them the opportunity to interact directly with the consumer group, and give NFB members the opportunity to ask questions of staff directly.

Employment First Work Group – The task force resulting from the Governor’s Executive Order 10-17 Initiative has submitted its report to him. The State Government Committee focused on employment issues in state agencies; basically it comes down to making sure that mid-level managers know the law. DSB has volunteered to serve as part of a resource network that would establish a person’s disability status, under the executive order, and make referrals. This is already a service that each rehab agency provides under the law, so it would be a waste to set up a separate entity to do that.

Jump Start – Planning has begun for the 2012 Jump Start. Last year was a great success, and we are looking forward to the same result this year.

Benefits Coordination – DSB is continuing to work with the Division of Aging and Adult Services, EmployAbility Project, Arkansas Work Incentive Network (AWIN) and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services to build the state’s capacity for supported employment services. Coordination with these partner agencies will help prevent duplication of services.

Employer as Customer. At the federal level there is a refocusing on the employer as the customer. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has developed a training program on this and DSB Staff Development Coordinator, Tony Brown, is working to customize the ARS program toward services to individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired.

## DSB DIVISION ISSUES

Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) – The Older Blind Advisory committee met this morning. They are making great progress in establishing structure and will have recommendations that we can use in the design of the OIB program as it goes forward into the future. Regarding the low level of funding for that program, nothing has really changed. It is as yet unknown whether OIB will be rolled into the Title I (Voc Rehab) program, but we may see this going forward in the final version of the Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization.

Jonesboro Office – The Jonesboro DSB staff and other DHS employees have been enduring a lot of discomfort following their transfer to the new facility. Some staff, particularly DSB were without air conditioning in August and heat in November. Now they are grappling with leaks from the roof. The building owner has gone through a series of repair companies trying to stop the leaks. We are prepared to place the DSB staff on itinerant travel assignments outside the agency for a short time if the leaks continue.

Consumer Successes – Congratulations to DSB VR Consumers and the field staff on the success both have experienced in the 2011 federal fiscal year. Everyone knows how tough the economy has been. Last year DSB reported 278 successful rehabilitation closures.

This year the figure increased to 305. Some of the other agency directors in the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind commented that this is pretty impressive. It took a great deal of teamwork amongst the consumers, the local offices and the finance and administrative staff to accomplish this. All are to be commended.

Team Reviews – As part of cross-training and succession planning, the area supervisors have been working in teams to conduct case reviews. Among the benefits are that supervisors can see how cases are handled in other areas, and staff can get feedback from other supervisors, which gives a wholly different perspective and everybody gains. I really appreciate the supervisors, because they have a huge workload already, and have embraced this change in a positive manner.

Statewide Meeting – The DSB Statewide Meeting had an excellent agenda reflecting recommendations from the federal review, and was very productive.

2012 Budget – DSB is kicking off the 2012 Budget and met with DHS budget staff to discuss seeking an increase in the Older Blind Program. However, all agencies have been instructed to budget at the existing level. The session starts February 13. As we move forward in the calendar year, DSB will move to re-establish the non-certified level for rehabilitation teacher positions, which was eliminated during the pay plan study in 2009. This issue was raised during federal review. We must recruit certified rehabilitation teachers and counselors, but need the option to re-advertise at a non-certified level if we are not successful at obtaining certified applicants, which is common. DSB will also seek special language in regard to recruiting and training. We may need to meet individually with OPM to explain these issues to them.

Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) – DSB is seeing steady progress in the growth of the Arkansas Information Reading Services (AIRS) and its computerized reading component NEWSLINE, produced by NFB. We are finding that our NEWSLINE utilization is increasing gradually and I expect additional usage due to recent outreach. We have increased our AIRS coverage of local newspapers across the state from 8 to 20 in the last year and a half, with some weekly and a few of them daily.

DSB Consumer Satisfaction Survey Process - Mr. Dickie Walker made a motion that two questions be added to the Older Blind and Vocational Rehabilitation Consumer Satisfaction surveys. (1) Is the Arkansas Information Reading Services available in your area? If so, do you take advantage of it? Irma Nelson seconded the motion. *Motion Passed.*

Additional Budget Information – The 2012 budget and the expenditures are in the packet. As we move through the year, we are on target for achieving our Maintenance of Effort (matching requirement for the Voc Rehab funds). It is still a tough situation for consumers and staff, because the Older Blind funds are very limited.

As you know, we contracted with World Services for the Blind to provide Rehab Teaching and related services to our consumers in the Older Blind program recently. Another contract period began December 1 and will go through June 30. With as little funding as we have for OIB, the Rehab Teachers (RTs) are severely limited in the frequency and depth of OIB services they can provide. This is why a major portion of RT labor is diverted to support required services to Vocational Rehabilitation consumers. The RT service component represents about \$1.2M dollars in labor and support costs, for which Older Blind federal funding is \$318,000.

#### END OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

#### APPOINTMENT and DUTIES OF 2012 DSB EMPLOYEE AWARD COMMITTEE –

The Board Chairman appointed Irma Nelson, Dickie Walker; and Teresa Doan to the Employee of the Year Committee. Ms. Nelson will serve as chair. Mr. Carr informed the committee members that he would give them until the end of January to set the beginning and end dates for nominations to be submitted. The deadline must give the committee ample time to review the nominations and select the candidates in time for board meeting and the presentation of the awards.

#### ACTION ITEMS FOLLOWING FEDERAL REVIEW and STATE AUDIT – Mrs. Katy

Morris acknowledged that the Board was familiar with the results of the monitoring review. DSB did well and was commended by the federal partner. Subsequently the division submitted a very limited Technical Assistance Plan which RSA accepted. Basically, the required action is in the area of development of a Supported Employment network in the state, and DSB will be working under the guidance of Jeanne Miller, Director of the Region VI Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Center of Hot Springs. RSA also took issue with selected DSB finance procedures, requiring changes in what DSB can accept from providers as an invoice. The staff are struggling to meet what the auditors require because both the staff and the providers have to change documentation procedures, but we must comply.

APPOINTMENT AND DUTIES OF 2012 STANDING COMMITTEES - The Board Chairman stated that he had sent out an email prior to the board meeting requesting responses if any of the board members and ex-officio board members had a preference about committee appointments, but he received no response. The Board Chairman appointed Board Members and Ex-Officio Board Members to the following committees:

2012 Consumer of the Year Committee - Angyln Young, Chairperson; Kara Aaron; and Dr. Larry Dickerson.

2012 Legislative Issues Committee - Gerald Carr, Chairperson; Jim Hill; and Sandra Edwards.

Budget Committee - Dickie Walker, Chairperson; James Gatewood; and Gary Hall.

Constitution and By-Laws Committee - Dr. Larry Dickerson, Chairperson; Irma Nelson; and Teresa Doan.

### **INTRODUCTION TO 2013 STATE PLAN PROCESS**

Mrs. Donna Walker introduced the 2013 State Plan process. The State Plan and goals are developed based on the most recent needs assessment and RSA guidance as far as what the division needs to be doing to meet federal Standards and Indicators. The state plan goals don't change very much year to year. The goals basically restate what we do, so we propose the same goals for 2013. These include:

- (1) to increase employment opportunities;
- (2) to increase transition services; and
- (3) to expand outreach, especially to unserved and underserved consumers.

The goal of the Supported Employment initiative is to improve Supported Employment (SE) outcomes. This is the area that DSB has the most difficulty with, because the number of providers willing to serve in supported employment cases is limited. The goals of this initiative are to increase the number of Supported Employment providers to better serve DSB consumers and to address the lack of knowledge and training that SE Providers and DSB staff have in the provision of SE services. We are requesting the board to approve the 2013 goals so we can start working on the state plan, develop the associated strategies for meeting the goals and hold the public forum. Mr. Dickie Walker made a motion to approve the direction of the State Plan, the goals, and the public forum. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion..... *Motion Passed.*

**DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER (DRC) REPORT** – Vincent McKinney and Elizabeth Eskew of the Disability Rights Center were present on behalf of Eddie Miller, Client Assistance Program Coordinator. The Disability Rights Center works with any individual with a disability on the state and federal level whose disability rights have been violated or if they feel like they have been discriminated against. If there is an issue that DRC can take care of, Mr. McKinney encouraged referral to the agency at [www.arkdisabilityrightscenters.org](http://www.arkdisabilityrightscenters.org) or by calling 501-296-1775 or 1-800-482-1174.

**ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AILC)** – No representative was present. A report was submitted with the board packet and is attached as a formal part of these minutes.

**CONSUMER INPUT** – The ACB State Convention will be held in Hot Springs at the Austin Hotel, April 21, 2012. The national convention will be held in Louisville, Kentucky, in July.

**2011 CONSUMER SUCCESS STORIES** – The DSB Area Supervisors shared with the Board the success stories of the 13 area Consumers of the Year, who were nominated for the state level award. The nominees were Michael Bellasai of Gassville, Maurice Buirts of Augusta, Kara Clarke of Conway, Patricia Dugan of Norphlet, Marvin Howden of Shannon Hills, Charles Jones of Batesville, Gustavo Manzanales of Little Rock, Lacara McKay of Texarkana, Beverly Osborne of Bentonville, Jessie Reeves of Stuttgart, Kayla Todd of Paris, Melissa Deroche of Little Rock, and Martha Washington of Blytheville.

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF DSB CONSUMER AND EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR** – Committee member Kara Aaron announced that the DSB Consumer of the Year for 2011 is Melissa Deroche of Little Rock. Her employer is World Services for the Blind.

The meeting was adjourned to the DSB reception honoring Ms. Deroche and all the 2011 Area Consumers of the Year.

The next regular quarterly board meeting will be held Friday, March 9, 2012 at 1:00 p.m. at the Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, First Floor, Conference Rooms A and B.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra Edwards  
Secretary