

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 8, 2008

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sharon Berry
Angyln Franquemont
Lori Hunter
Nola McKinney
Irma Nelson
Dickie Walker

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron
Jim Hill
Sandy Rowland
Ramona Sangalli

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

James Johnson

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Ann Moore

DHS Representative: None

Attorney General's Office Representative: Erika Gee

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Katy Morris, Coral Virden, Dwana Williams, Charlie Cain-Davis, Jim Pearson, Donna Walker, Mary Cabaniss, Kandy Cayce, Tanya VanHouten, Ginny McWilliams, Debera Coleman, Chris McKenzie, Francine Crain, Lou Talley

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Mrs. Nola McKinney called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA. Motion was made by Mrs. Sharon Berry to approve the agenda. Mr. Dickie Walker seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

APPROVAL OF 02/04/08 MINUTES. Motion was made by Mrs. Berry to approve the minutes. Mr. Walker seconded the motion. *Motion passed.*

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT - The division is still attempting to adjust to the loss of Mr. Hudson. An account number has been provided to those individuals who had expressed an interest in contributing to the educational accounts for the kids. The account is at Arvest Bank and should be marked "Hudson Children Contribution" Arvest Account number 63606988. If someone needs to follow up please contact Mrs. Katy Morris or Ms Coral Virden.

We learned only recently that former DSB Rehabilitation Teacher and Supervisor Nikita Miller was struggling with pancreatic cancer. Nikki passed away last week. Lou Talley also lost her father and June Richardson lost her mother recently. Lou is the Field Supervisor in south Arkansas, and June is a Rehab Teacher in central Arkansas.

NATIONAL ISSUES

DSB is tracking national legislative issues that are on going. I will get the opportunity to visit with Senator Mark Pryor March 19 and Senator Blanche Lincoln March 25 and again in April at CSAVR, which is the national organization of state rehab agencies.

TECHNOLOGY. Technology is a big concern, not only with what access consumers have to current technology, but what access is being built in to emerging technology.

HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA) – DSB needs feedback on what voting difficulties were encountered recently by persons who are blind.... Field Administrator Donna Walker reported that she had experienced some problems (basically related to a lack of trained poll workers familiar with voting access)....Board Chairman Nola McKinney reported that she had encountered no problems recently with voting. I will relay this information to Secretary of State, Charlie Daniels, within the next few weeks.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING. The existing Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP) system is facing major change. Currently RSA proposes to compress the multiple existing centers into ten surviving centers. This is of great concern to the rehab agencies across the nation. For DSB, it could negatively affect our ability to cost-effectively train field staff, because we work closely with the existing RRCEP in Hot Springs to supplement the very limited DSB training funds.

STATE ISSUES

ATTORNEY GENERAL OPINION. As requested by the DSB Board, DHS Director, John Selig has requested the Attorney General to issue an official opinion on who is responsible to evaluate the DSB Director under current state law. Attorney General representative Erika Gee reported that the opinion may be available in April. DHS Deputy Director Steve Jones was instrumental in making this joint effort happen.

2009 GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLANS. As a part of our legislative packet for the upcoming session, DSB intends to submit a bill that would amend current state law to formally include the director of the state rehab agency for the blind as a voting member of the state Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Federal law already requires such WIB membership at the state level.

TRANSITION. Our partnership with the state transition community is still growing. Mrs. Tanya VanHouten is our Project Director. The Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP) Conference was held the first Tuesday and Wednesday in January. DSB had good representation, and partner agency representatives continue to follow up with DSB staff. We are expecting improved relations and better information to and from our staff.

TARGETED STATE JOBS. DHS Personnel Manager Gary Cain and I continue discussions with the state Office of Personnel Management (OPM) toward identifying the high-turnover classifications within the state system. The plan is to target such classifications that offer appropriate salary or wages and develop the qualifications of individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired to fill such jobs under a state guaranteed employment program. The initiative will require a governor's Executive Order or state law, and will be added to the DSB legislative package if formal commitment is secured.

VENDING FACILITY PROGRAM. Business and Technology Administrator, Jim Pearson, and I met February 2 with the Committee of Licensed Blind Vendors at the quarterly meeting. The biggest issue discussed was the overall diminishing support for the vending locations at the state level. Nationally, the Randolph Shepherd Program continues to be threatened by Congressional proposals moving to extend program eligibility to persons with disabilities unrelated to blindness. The major concern is that there are already too few lucrative locations for current vendors who are blind without extending the program to other populations.

STATE PAY PLAN STUDY. Along with all other state agencies, DSB has submitted its salary level justifications required under the OPM State Pay Plan Study. We are awaiting OPM's recommendations to the Governor between now and the legislative session. Those recommendations will likely be more heavily influenced by requests from larger agencies which share certain classifications with DSB, such as Rehab Counselors and Rehab Assistants. DSB may have more influence on the salary level outcome for Rehab Teachers because we are the only agency that employs them in that job function. The danger is that small numbers may have a corresponding impact on classification outcome.

QUARTERLY RSA MONITORING REPORT. DSB has established action plans to address recommendations made by RSA following the Annual Review in June.

- Field Services Administrator Donna Walker is tracking homemaker closures and working with Supervisors and Counselors to reduce the percentage that homemakers represent of overall closures and tying it to performance.
- Planning Director Kandy Cayce has worked to negotiate an agreement with partner state agencies to improve the statewide capacity for Supportive Employment.

QUARTERLY RSA MONITORING REPORT (Continued).

- Thanks to the generosity of our DHS sister agencies, we have been able to reduce the ratio of field staff to supervisors per RSA recommendation and have responsible plans in place for further reduction to increase the quality and frequency of field supervision.
- We have succeeded in securing the support of the Department of Finance and Administration to acquire appropriation necessary to responsibly spend federal carryover funds. Such appropriation had been requested unsuccessfully in previous budgets, but the RSA report, requiring DSB to take timely steps, provided the impetus for recommended approval by the interim committee of the general assembly.
- DSB Chief Fiscal Officer Mary Cabaniss and I met with Willis White and other officials from the Delta Independent Living Center in Pine Bluff to propose a pilot program aimed at identifying unserved and underserved individuals in Delta's catchment area through a partnership with faith-based groups. The intention is to utilize the groups as a bridge to result in DSB services to eligible individuals.
- DSB Statistician Cortney Heslep and Staff Development Specialist Feona Barnett met recently in Washington with federal Social Security Administration officials to redesign DSB's methodology for reimbursement of Voc Rehab expenditures. Their efforts have resulted in notification that DSB should be expecting \$45,000 to arrive shortly and continue thereafter as claims are presented.

END OF INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

CLARIFICATION OF CONSUMER OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP – Following discussion, Chairman McKinney clarified that the members of the Consumer of the Year committee would be Ms. Lori Hunter, Mr. Sandy Rowland and Ms. Irma Nelson. Ms. Hunter will serve as committee chair, and DSB Field Administrator Donna Walker will serve as staff to the committee.

CONSUMER OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE REPORT - Chairman McKinney requested that the committee submit a progress report at the June Board meeting.

APPLICATIONS REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT – Chairman McKinney reported that the committee met at 9:00 this morning (March 8, 2008) and narrowed the list of 65 applicants down to the twelve most qualified for the position of DSB Director. Department of Human Services staff assisted the committee in preparing an applicant questionnaire that will assist the committee in further evaluating the remaining twelve. Applicants are to return the questionnaires to DHS by March 28, 2008. The committee

will meet Friday, April 4, 2008 at 10:30 a.m. to assess the responses to the questionnaire and narrow the applicants down to three. The final three applicants will be interviewed by the full board at a Special Board meeting Friday, May 2, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. A decision will be made that day, and a recommendation submitted to the Governor. Chairman McKinney stated that any board member who could not be present at the meeting should notify Ms. Coral Virden, because they can participate and vote via telephone. Ms. Lori Hunter made a motion to approve the May 2, 2008 special board meeting. Mrs. Anglyn Franquemont seconded the motion. **Motion Passed.**

WELCOME TO NEW DSB STAFF NEW SINCE 12/08/07 BOARD MEETING – DSB Interim Director introduced Mr. Shawn Smith, new Director of Arkansas Information Reading Services for the Blind (AIRS), which operates on the campus of AETN. Also introduced to the board were Mrs. Debera Coleman, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor in Little Rock, serving Pulaski County; and Ms. Lou Talley, long-time VR Counselor (certified) and Rehab Teacher (certified), who has recently been promoted to Field Supervisor for the El Dorado, Texarkana and Pine Bluff offices. It was also noted that Darline Tucker was the new VR Counselor in Batesville.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS – VICE CHAIRMAN & SECRETARY – Nominations were solicited and the board voted unanimously to re-elect Mrs. Sharon Berry as Vice Chairman. **Motion Passed.** Nominations were solicited and the board voted unanimously to re-elect Ms. Irma Nelson as Secretary. **Motion Passed.**

DISCUSSION OF DSB GOALS FOR 2009 STATE PLAN – Mrs. Donna Walker gave a preliminary overview of the proposed goals and strategies of the Vocational Rehabilitation State Plan and Supplement for Supported Employment for federal fiscal year 2009, effective October 1, 2008. The discussion was intended to give the board an early opportunity to review and approve the general direction of the goals and strategies before being asked to approve the full plan at the June Board Meeting. The proposed plan itself will be posted on the DSB web site and a public forum held to solicit input for consideration by the board in finalizing the plan for submission July 1. Based upon RSA guidance, the proposed goals include:

Goal #1: DSB will assist consumers in achieving quality employment and self-sufficiency. Toward this end, DSB will employ the following strategies:

- A. Communicate with consumers, advocates, service providers, education authorities, the disability service delivery system, and staff to foster a cultural shift that emphasizes the value of employment rather than benefits as the avenue to self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion, economic equality, and integration into society.

- B. Emphasize both the potential of people who are blind or severely visually impaired and the perspective of employment as the avenue to self-sufficiency in staff training.
- C. Work with youth who are blind or severely visually impaired, the Arkansas Department of Education, local education authorities, other service providers, parents, and families to encourage early discussions with students about the expectations of employment and their skills, abilities and talents that will empower them to achieve self-sufficiency.
- D. Support peer mentoring of people who are blind or severely visually impaired that encourages employment and empowers individuals to risk leaving the benefits system.
- E. Support assistive technology services that enhance employability.
- F. Pursue options for securing technical assistance for consumers and counselors related to the development and implementation of small business and self-employment plans.

Goal #2: DSB will promote employment through the effective use of resources. To accomplish this goal, DSB will implement the following strategies:

- A. Organize and align case service funds, other resources, and policies to support consumers in achieving quality of employment outcomes as the avenue to self-sufficiency.
- B. Emphasize meaningful consumer involvement, choice and responsibility.
- C. Support staff in meeting CSPD standards.
- D. Partner with the workforce system and other sources of comparable benefits and services to maximize the resources needed to empower consumers to achieve employment.

Goal #3: DSB will emphasize the employment potential of students who are blind or severely visually impaired and improve the outreach and outcomes for transition-aged students. Toward this goal, DSB will implement the following strategies:

- A. Increase the number of outreach activities with students, parents, and school personnel related to employment expectations for students who are blind or severely visually impaired.
- B. Improve the outreach and referral process with transition students, parents and education to encourage clear communication and increased applications for services.
- C. Build partnerships with school transition personnel to incorporate career-focused and/or work-based experiences into Individual Education Plans.
- D. Engage transition-age students who are blind or severely visually impaired in establishing goals toward employment and self-sufficiency.

Goal #4: DSB will emphasize the meaningful involvement of consumers, public/private partners, employers and other stakeholders in DSB programs, services and activities. To accomplish this goal DSB will pursue the following strategies:

- A. Support the DSB Board to build capacity for community involvement and participation.
- B. Expand outreach efforts to support the mission and goals of DSB and to reach underserved populations.
- C. Participate in meetings and collaborate with public and private partners.
- D. Include consumers and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of staff training and outreach activities.

Mrs. Sharon Berry requested that the board be sent a separate copy of the proposed state plan outside of that which is intended to be posted on the web.

DISCUSSION OF DSB 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Chairman McKinney announced DSB will celebrate its 25th Anniversary Friday, June 6, 2008 at the Arkansas School for the Blind Multi-purpose room, in conjunction with the DSB quarterly Board meeting. The board meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. The 25th Anniversary reception will be held from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., and will feature comments from consumers, former DSB staff and the new DSB Director.

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

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

CONSUMER INPUT – The state ACB convention will be held April 25-26, 2008 at the Otter Creek LaQuinta Inn in Little Rock. The state NFB convention is tentatively scheduled for September 26-27 at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Jonesboro.

The board voted unanimously to schedule the next regular quarterly meeting Friday, June 6, 2008, at 10:00 a.m. at the Arkansas School for the Blind Multi-purpose room in conjunction with the DSB 25th Anniversary reception that will be held 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Irma Nelson
Secretary