**Appendix A: Employment and Training Workgroup Update**

**Employment and Training**

**Workgroup members: Beth Rival, Eileen Akers Primary focus: a more informed understanding of the  operation and structure of BESB Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) beyond the time that can be spent at a Board meeting.**

**Meetings were held on Aug. 18 and Sept. 6. and appreciation to all who participated including VR Supervisor Mary Burgard for coordination and information and to Carlotta Copenhaver Transition Coordinator, Jonathan Richmond Counselor Coordinator, as well as to VR Counselors Jonathan Alberto, Angelo Vitale, and Enaida Mendoza. Special thanks to Zachary Moore for setting up our meetings.**

**As reported by Mary Burgard, currently there are**

**1- VR State Director (vacant)**

**1- VR Supervisor**

**1- VR Counselor Coordinator**

**9 VR Counselors — (2 vacant)**

**3 Rehabilitation Teachers (1 Vacant)**

**1- Transition Coordinator**

**2 — clerical (1 Vacant)**

**1- Quality Control Reviewer**

**The transition-aged students program was the focus of the first meeting. The transition program consists of a supervisor and two counselors. (One counselor position needs to be refilled.) Although some preliminary work can begin at age 14, focus begins at age 16. Interaction continues with students through the first year of college. Paid summer employment has included many remote positions where tasks are clearly delineated. Peer interaction is another benefit.**

**Training and employment was the focus of the meeting on Sept. 6. A majority of BESB clients are not part of the system beginning with Children's Services but are newly registered clients focusing on maintaining or finding new employment. There are several categories of vision loss. Clients come in through Adult Services. The process includes different types of assessment. Examples may include trial work experience and one to one or group support. The IPE is a road map which is necessarily highly individualized and can always be modified.**

**Regarding the issue of staff training, it was indicated that familiarity with people who are legally blind or visually impaired before being employed by BESB may often occur through American Job Centers. These centers also have adaptive technology where technology skills can be practiced.**

**Partnerships with Computers for the Blind in Texas have been established. Remote computer training was also noted. There are clients who have appropriate technology prior to acquiring employment. Acquisition of assistive technology can be a deal breaker when placing a prospective employee. There is adherence to a fine line in job development referencing the ADA.**

**In describing how computer training is essential for most jobs, the BEP program was cited as an example. BESB has replenished supplies to make it possible for some locations to reopen. This includes some college sites. Other sites are closed forever because there is not enough foot traffic. Because most state agencies are operating as hybrid, foot traffic is limited. Summer BEP sites have done very well. Furthermore some operators are overseeing two or three smaller locations including micro marts.**

**Addressing the area of manufacturing jobs, Mary referred to staff attendance at MASK out of Waterbury and how our folks can fit into that model. However, automation in manufacturing jobs was noted.**

**Another topic was the duration of residential training to help people who are blind develop a set of non-visual skills and techniques as well as achieving an emotional adjustment to blindness. Although there is no longer a twelve-week restriction, most programs are shorter than they used to be. Nevertheless training could last for nine months.**

**Preliminary Recommendations:**

**1. Staff**

**Given the enhanced scope of the transition program, in order for this program to be effective, the position of transition counselor must be filled as soon as possible.**

**Because an overwhelming majority of employment positions require knowledge of technology, it is imperative to have adequate BESB staff to provide technology training and employment follow-up. Currently there are two technologists on staff. VR is down one technologist. It is an urgent need to make every effort to rush positions through. Meanwhile contracting out needs to continue and perhaps increase.**

**The need for adequate VR field staff cannot be overstated. In tandem with the highly individualized nature of each situation, trust is at the core of how effectively a client and a VR staff member can work together to achieve a meaningful outcome. Short staffing in the northern part of the state was noted. Priority is urged to meet staffing needs.**

**2. We recommend a report to this Board of job placements annually at each December meeting to include a brief job description, also noting the visual status of each client placed, that is, totally blind, legally blind, visually impaired, or visually impaired progressive.**

**3. In summary, because of the special needs of people dealing with lack of vision, the integrity of BESB must be fully supported, including adequate staffing to fulfill the mission of this bureau.**

**4. This workgroup should continue to function to further study training and employment, including implementation of the VR State Plan.**

**program**

**we need to have an update about case closures and just what is precisely happening with getting jobs for people and the procedures that are in place. We suggest making a specific recommendation to the Board that VR make an annual report to the Board that includes a detailed update about closures.**

**“Technology accessibility and training” should be added under both Employment Services and Education Services.**

**Evaluation and identification**

**Doctors evaluation**

**Parent participation**

**Services and support**

**Data from PTP**

**NEAT market for training, perhaps also with Steve Deltatto.**

**Trades , electrical and plumbing**

**Leap, mobility**

**Staff positions need to be filled, especially technologists**

**Mary Berguard recommends waiting till staff positions have been refilled to continue Education and training.**