**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)
Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
DeafBlind Advisory Committee (DBAC)
Meeting by Zoom
Draft Meeting Minutes
February 28, 2023

Review of Meeting Protocol
The protocol for participation in the DeafBlind Advisory Committee Meeting was reviewed by Pat Clark.

Voting Members Present
Sandra Miles, Department of Developmental Services (DDS) - Southbury Training School (STS); Wayne Seidel, Department of Developmental Services (DDS); Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD); Hana Tyler, Chair, Consumer Representative; Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, DeafBlind Support and Access Network (DBSAN); Elise Arseneau, Oak Hill; Al Sylvestre, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired; Barbara Cloonan, Parent; Karen Olson, New England Consortium on DeafBlindness (NEC); Erich Krengel, Capitol Region Mental Health Center (DMHAS); Kathy Morgan, Guardian; Christine Telford, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC)

Non-Voting Members Present
Carol Jenkins, ADS-BESB Director; Christopher Lassen, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Krystal Kelly, ADS-BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Mary Johns, ADS-BESB Children’s Services; Muriel Aparo, ADS-BRS, CT Tech Act; Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS

Voting Members Absent
Cheri Byrnes, DeafBlind Association of Connecticut;,

Non-Voting Members Absent
None

Others Present
Sue Pedersen, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN); Rayah Martin, ADS-BESB; LaTonya Major, ADS-BESB

Introductions
Chair Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:12 a.m. and asked that a roll call be taken. Mr. Lassen conducted the roll call.

Chair Tyler then introduced the new BESB director Carol Jenkins. Ms. Jenkins gave a brief overview of her background, beginning as someone who received services herself from the Nebraska Commission for the Blind. She attended Northern Illinois University, has a background in Early Childhood Development and as a Rehabilitation Counselor working with a DeafBlind caseload. Before coming to BESB she was the Deputy Director of the Commission for the Blind in Nebraska.

The committee welcomed Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn stated she hoped to be able to meet with her face-to-face sometime soon.

Approval of Minutes from October 25, 2022
Chair Tyler provided time for committee members to review the previous minutes from October 25th.

Karen Olson noted that she was listed as absent from the previous meeting, but a Ms. Olsen with a different spelling was noted as seconding the minutes of the July meeting. She wasn’t sure which was correct but wanted it noted.

MOTION: Chair Tyler made a motion for a vote to approve the minutes with Ms. Olson’s exception noted. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn seconded approval, and minutes were approved.

Old Business

Update on DeafBlind Technology Program
Muriel Aparo provided an update on the DeafBlind Technology Program for the second quarter, October through December, 2022.

On October 14th she attended the Disability Employment Awareness Resource Fair in New Britain to promote the program. It was well-attended.

On October 27th she and Marjorie Santos met with 10 DeafBlind individuals and were able to explain and clarify their services to them. They have met with four people since then and have one more scheduled in May.

Ms. Aparo shared the following numbers:**

**Total assessment $1446
Inventory and Devices $7800
Installation and Training $8300
Administrative $8200
Outreach $4400
Total spent for Quarter 2 $10,922

Ms. Flaherty Vaughn expressed concerns about co-meetings between the CT Tech Act and BESB due to federal funding and possible conflicts of interest.

Ms. Aparo stated they work well together and have found it helpful. Once the range of services are described, they are able to clarify it further in individual meetings. Muriel and Marjorie each do their own part.

Mr. Lassen noted that the state receives federal money. It was agreed that BRS would get the federal funds through the Tech Act. Collaboration between BESB, BRS, and Access Through Technology is necessary. Ms. Santos and Ms. Aparo have identified a critical need to explain what BESB and Access Through Technology can do. There has never been any audit finding of impropriety.

Ms. Aparo noted that funds are administered separately and are accounted for separately.

Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn thanked them for the clarification and asked whether there was any intention to reduce spending on interpreters.

Ms. Aparo said no, the issue is availability of interpreters. Her program has more money for interpreters, so they have been the ones to pay for them. There are very few tactile interpreters.

Ms. Telford added that the state’s streamlined services helps people get services faster. In other states without such a process it can take much longer. She suggested having a DeafBlind individual get train-the-trainer experience.

Chair Tyler asked how many people are served with this program per year.

Ms. Aparo answered that they average 10-15 per year. Most are returning consumers, and they are happy to have added a new person this year. There is $123,000 available for this year and about $40,000 has been spent so far. She and Ms. Santos are working together on more outreach.**

**Ms. Santos added that they are able to address needs together when they collaborate in these meetings.

Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked if they encourage people to reach out when they need upgraded equipment.

Ms. Aparo said yes. They like people to keep equipment for at least three years. When updated equipment or training is needed, they need a new application and to still meet the financial guidelines. Older devices need to be returned once new ones are received.

BESB Director Jenkins asked if children are eligible. They are provided equipment for school but often also need devices at home.

Ms. Aparo answered yes. They would love to have children apply as long as the parents meet the financial guidelines.

Mr. Lassen stated he’s happy to do outreach to see if we have Children’s Services clients that would benefit. He also wanted to recognize the success of Ms. Aparo and Ms. Santos.

Ms. Telford clarified that in a train-the-trainer model the DeafBlind client would become a contractor with the state.

Ms. Aparo noted that there a DeafBlind individual who trains clients in Braille.

Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn thanked them for their explanation and stated she would like to see a DeafBlind person experienced with technology involved.

New Business

Expenditures Through December 31, 2022
Mr. Lassen had hoped to send out a summary in advance of this meeting, but the spreadsheet he received had personal information that he was not able to have edited out in time.

Mr. Lassen reported the following expenditures:
 Total allocations this year through December: $65,508
 $59,750 of that is for direct SSP services
 $5,750 of that is for interpreters
 CAN is responsible for $52,617
 CIB used $3,456 to send four clients to summer camp
 $2,090 was used for an individuals for UCP of Eastern CT
 $1,590 was for another individual and handled through a conservator.

Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked for clarification on the fiscal year.

Mr. Lassen stated the annual funds available are about $240,000, and of those a little over $140,000 is for the Communication Advocacy Network (CAN). These numbers reflect the fiscal year so far, starting July 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022.

Ms. Morgan asked if they knew how many in group homes at CIB can be involved in the program.

Ms. Arsenau said she’d check with the data specialist to make sure the list is up to date.

Mr. Lassen stated that there are currently 32 clients listed.

Ms. Morgan reminded the committee that the DeafBlind grant started in 1970, and it was focused on Oak Hill. With the aging of that original population, extending it to the community is good.

Mr. Lassen noted that the amount of the Oak Hill contract for the 32 individuals is $38,354.

Ms. Cloonan noted that it is important that DeafBlind clients at Oak Hill have access to the program and that it seems that staffing issues are complication the ability of Oak Hill to provide these services. It’s important to try to get these services to the consumers. There are still funds to use and time to use them.

Director Jenkins asked what Oak Hill is doing to try to increase connectivity for the DeafBlind consumers that this grant is supporting.

Ms. Arsenau stated they are working with development. They struggle with one-to-one staffing. They met with the camp to look for creative options and want to make sure they still fall under the grant.

Mr. Seidel said the updated figures are useful and would like to see updated figures in writing at the next meeting. He encouraged utilization of funding.

Mr. Sylvestre echoed the request for an updated copy of the financial spreadsheet.

Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked how many DeafBlind clients reside at Oak Hill, given the staffing issues and difficulty finding staff who use sign language.

It was answered that there is one house, but were not sure of the exact number.

Report from CAN on SSP Recruitment
Ms. Pederson reported that they have started sending out job descriptions but have not received any responses so far. They are prioritizing SSPs (Support Services Provider) but have not gotten feedback. They are asking DeafBlind individuals to reach out to friends and family who may be eligible.

Director Jenkins asked if a DeafBlind consumer has a friend or family member who could serve as an SSP for them, who would they reach out to?

Ms. Pedersen answered that Ms. Santos is working on adding the job application to the information being sent. Interested persons can reach out to CAN or to Ms. Santos directly.

Ms. Flaherty Vaughn voiced concern about the lack of interpreting. She feels people should be more aware of the need, and should have concerns alleviated regarding physical contact.

Ms. Telford asked how much it pays.

Ms Pedersen answered that it pays $16.50 - $20 an hour to start.

Ms. Telford asked if anyone had reached out to the companion care community, which pays about $25 an hour.

Ms. Morgan stated that she feel Oak Hill has done a good job of trying to put things together during the pandemic.
Original language in the grant references multiple disabilities.
Suggested moving on with the agenda.

Ms Santos asked if a consumer recruits their own SSP, what would they look for in terms of hours and mileage?

Ms. Flaherty Vaughn added that in terms of SSPs, not everyone has or can afford the level of car insurance needed.

Sue Pedersen answered that they pay an hourly rate, and it’s usually three to four hours plus mileage.

Ms. Santos asked if they considered putting a limit on mileage, and if hours are distributed evenly among consumers. She also brought up a consumer who felt there were issues of favoritism.

Ms Pedersen answered she’s surprised someone felt they were not being treated equally. She noted that sometimes location is an issue in finding SSPs.

Mr. Stanley requested the flyer used for recruiting SSPs, and mentioned a program called Three Monkeys that can be used for setting up SSPs and interpreters. His understanding is they could work through the state or directly with the consumer. He stated it is a national program that provides training for SSPs.

Chair Tyler requested the job description and requirements for SSPs

Mr. Chege noted that there are fewer than five tactile interpreters in the state, and asked if there are positions open for DeafBlind individuals.

Ms. Telford said there is an opening for a DeafBlind employment specialist.

Review of Meeting Dates for 2023 (4/25, 7/25, 10/24)
The meeting dates that were approved previously were reviewed, and no discussion or changes were made.

BESB Program Updates
Mr. Lassen reported that recruitment for a rehabilitation technologist has been completed. Adult Services is working with the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) to realize improvements and expanding outreach to look for additional community partners. Adult Services is experiencing a bit of a funding cruch, although there is still funding for DeafBlind and Access Through Technology.**

**Ms. Johns reported that Children’s Services has hired four new Education Consultants and one Orientation and Mobility instructor.

Director Jenkins reported that BESB is working with ten DeafBlind clients looking for employment. She noted that BESB also has a staffing shortage and she is focused on having support staff so that we can provide more services to consumers.

Report from the Chair
Chair Tyler asked if there is funding if anyone is interested in becoming an SSP, and then opened the floor to questions, comments, and concerns.

Ms. Santos responded that training would be provided by the agency or individual that uses the SSPs. There is no certification or degree, but there is training on being respectful of culture and use of technology.

Announcements
Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn shared that the second annual DeafBlind camp is scheduled for August 7-12, 2023 in Griswold, CT. The goal is 15 campers and 15 staff members. They will be hosting an open house on August 10.

Ms. Olson said the grant for the New England Consortium on Deafblindness runs out in September of this year, and they have applied for a five-year renewal.

Adjournment
MOTION: Mr. Lassen made a motion to adjourn and it was seconded by Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn. The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE: April 25, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom**