**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)**

**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)**

**Deafblind Advisory Committee (DBAC)**

**Draft Meeting Minutes**

**January 26, 2021**

**Voting Members Present**

**Tara Brown-Ogilvie, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC); Barbara Cloonan, Parent/Guardian Representative; Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, Deafblind Association of CT; Erich Krengel, Capitol Region Mental Health Clinic (DMHAS); Sandra Miles, Department of Developmental Services (DDS) - Southbury Training School; Kathy Morgan, Conservator; Karen Olson, New England Consortium on Deafblindness (alternate voting member for Ms. Luiselli); Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD); Al Sylvestre, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired; Hana Tyler, Consumer Representative**

**Non-Voting Members Present**

**Heidi Henaire, ADS-Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS); Mary Johns, ADS-BESB Children’s Services; Krystal Kelly, ADS-BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Christopher Lassen, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Wayne Seidel, DDS; Elise Arseneau, Oak Hill; Brian Sigman, ADS-BESB Director**

**Voting Members Absent**

**Tracy Luiselli, New England Consortium on Deafblindness (NEC); Emily Morgante, Parent/Guardian Representative**

**Non-voting Members absent**

**Others Present**

**Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS; Martin Greenberg; Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative Liaison; Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Susan Shatney, Counselor for the Deaf, ADS-BRS Community Living Program; Lisa Tanguay, ADS-BESB; Sue Pederson, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN); Alan Gunzburg**

**Introductions**

**On behalf of the Chair, Mr. Sigman took a roll call to establish who was present at the virtual meeting.**

**Approval of Minutes from October 27, 2020**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre made a motion to adopt the October 27, 2020 minutes as corrected, seconded by Ms. Miles. Motion carried.**

**Old Business**

**Update on Deafblind Technology Program**

**Ms. Aparo provided an update on the Access through Technology grant. For the time period between July 1 – September 30, 2020, there was one returning consumer and one new consumer. Due to COVID-19, services were suspended in March, but presently, virtual services are being held with some individuals who have experience with technology. Two devices were purchased, and one device was upgraded during this time period. Equipment and upgrades totaled $7,046.71, installation and training expenditures totaled $764.05 and administrative costs were $2,124.69. There are five consumers receiving virtual services, two applications pending the restart of in-person visits and three new consumers were added to the grant from BESB referrals.**

**New Business**

**Mr. Sigman requested that an agenda item be added to this meeting under the category of New Business to affirm voting membership status for two new members of the Deafblind Advisory Committee. Wayne Seidel from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) would be replacing Robert Smith as a voting member. Elise Arseneau from Oak Hill would be replacing Still Fowler as a voting member.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved, seconded by Ms. Miles, to amend the agenda in order to vote on two new members to the Deafblind Advisory Committee. Motion carried unanimously.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved, seconded by Ms. Miles, to approve Wayne Seidel as a voting member to represent DDS and Elise Arseneau as a voting member to represent Oak Hill on the Deafblind Advisory Committee. Motion carried unanimously.**

**FY 2021 Expenditures to Date**

**Mr. Sigman reported that he reached out to Oak Hill and Communication Advocacy Network (CAN) representatives to obtain updates on services provided to the clients served though the community inclusion funding. None of the 32 Oak Hill clients have received community inclusion services for the first half of this fiscal year. Out of their $44,897 allotment, nothing has been expended through December. Communication Advocacy Network was allotted $143,353 of which they have expended $26,497 on 15 of the 23 clients during the first half of the fiscal year. UCP has expended $3,954 in services to one client out of their contracted amount of $9,999. Vendor AJ was allotted $9,987 and has not expended any funds through December. JS was allotted $2,536 for one client and has expended $1,227 through December. JR was allotted $9,999 and has expended $5,530 through December. Other expenses included $6,347 for interpreters and $4,248 in braille instruction. In total, $52,784 has been expended thus far in FY 2021 out of a budget appropriation of $265,738.**

**Mr. Sylvestre requested that Oak Hill share information with the committee members on what form of community inclusion would be occurring within the confines of COVID-19. Mr. Sylvestre also asked if State budget authorities were aware of the difficulties being encountered in utilizing these funds due to the impact of COVID-19 so they would be aware that the reason was not a lack of need for these funds. Mr. Sigman reported that the agency’s Commissioner and the Fiscal Manager are both very aware of the adverse impact COVID-19 has created for the expenditure of funds for client services across the Bureaus within the Department and the circumstances with the community inclusion funds were not unique.**

**COVID-19 Updates**

**Mr. Sigman emphasized that although the agency has been distributing updates related to COVID-19, it is also equally important for all individuals to remain current on updates that are being provided by the Governor****. There are two important websites where current information is available:** [**ct.gov/coronavirus**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fct.gov%2Fcoronavirus&data=04%7C01%7CKathleen.Sullivan%40ct.gov%7Ced24a05248eb44bb7f7b08d8c17e8fcd%7C118b7cfaa3dd48b9b02631ff69bb738b%7C0%7C0%7C637472096619230032%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=2Iuu%2F2AbG0ApV2jyvTYhYcqy%2BSENfTKRcMaJOQ4knFo%3D&reserved=0) **and** [**ct.gov/covidvaccine**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fct.gov%2Fcovidvaccine&data=04%7C01%7CKathleen.Sullivan%40ct.gov%7Ced24a05248eb44bb7f7b08d8c17e8fcd%7C118b7cfaa3dd48b9b02631ff69bb738b%7C0%7C0%7C637472096619239991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=0Hse8trMClGmP%2F%2FY8ss7aGA%2BCecPuu0zq5YJUwGUJnw%3D&reserved=0)**. Mr. Sigman stressed the importance of everyone distributing these websites to their respective organizations. BESB continues to have in-person services available, utilizing safety protocols that were developed with assistance from this committee. The protocols include a series of questions to verify that it is safe for the in-person visit to occur. Virtual services are still the preferred approach.**

**Mr. Lassen requested an agenda item be added to this meeting to discuss new service plan recommendations based on a recently held meeting among the Deafblind Review Team.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved to add the Deafblind Review Team’s items to this agenda, seconded by Ms. Cloonan. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Service Provider Recommendations**

**Ms. Arseneau reported that unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 has limited the ability of Oak Hill to offer community inclusion services to their clients. Mr. Sylvestre expressed concern that it appears Oak Hill was not using a pro-active approach and if the role-out of vaccines does not resolve these issues, clients may be left isolated in group homes with no social interaction for the remainder of the fiscal year. Ms. Arseneau reported that Oak Hill has been offering virtual activities such as sports and fitness programs, yoga classes and holding a virtual concert series with individuals who perform on a weekly basis. Oak Hill anticipates using some of the contracted funding as the fiscal year progresses. Ms. Morgan and Ms. Cloonan expressed their gratitude to Oak Hill for their efforts with these virtual activities.**

**Ms. Pederson provided an update on the types of services Communication Advocacy Network (CAN) is offering to their clients. Clients are using ASL as their means of communication. Some of them have been feeling very isolated. They have been limited to outings consisting of shopping or medical appointments only. There have three clients enrolled in a Deaf Wellness Recreation Center day program located in Wallingford.**

**Recommendations of Deafblind Review Sub-committee**

**Mr. Lassen reported that the Client Service Plan Review Team (CSPRT) met to discuss the service request of new client MG who would like to receive services from Communication Advocacy Network (CAN). MG is 68 years old, recently having moved to Connecticut from New York. MG had been working with the Helen Keller National Center. MG is conversant in ASL and tactile sign and has some components of an environmental notification system available. The Adult Services Program will facilitate an assessment of the new residence, completing and replacing any environmental components as necessary.  MG has other adaptive technology available but may benefit from services through the Access Through Technology grant to finish the technology upgrade that was underway prior to relocating to Connecticut.  The client will also be referred for mobility instruction and for Braille instruction if the contracted Braille Instructor has capacity to accept additional clients at this time.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre made a motion, seconded by Ms. Miles to accept the recommendation of the CSPRT to add MG to the CAN contract, to incorporate their summary with the minutes, and for it to be made available in an accessible format to the committee members. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Report from the BESB Director**

**Mr. Sigman reported that at an earlier meeting he announced that the staff of Adult Services were working on developing “How-to Video’s” which have now been posted on the agency’s YouTube site and those links will be available soon. The videos demonstrate how to pour hot liquids, make simple sewing repairs and how to fill out a check. The SRC and the Advisory Board both approved changes to the Vocational Rehabilitation policy on personal adjustment training. These proposed updates went through a public comment period prior to being approved. The updated policy will become effective on February 1, 2021. The most recent stimulus relief act includes funding for Randolph-Sheppard vending facility managers across the country whose businesses have been impacted by COVID-19. All but four of the vending facility locations through the BESB Business Enterprise Program remain closed at the present time. The only facilities currently open consist of 3 micro-marts and one exclusively vending machine location. As for the other facilities, the vending facility managers have not had income from these businesses since the onset of the pandemic and will not be able to reopen their businesses until sufficient building population returns to support the businesses. The Governor has appointed three new members to the BESB State Rehabilitation Council: Phillip Magalnick and Dennis Regan filled vacancies in the category of Recipient of Services and Jennifer Jenkins filled a vacancy in the category of Client Assistance Program. With the change of President, Mark Schultz is no longer the Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration. Betsy DeVos is no longer the Secretary of Education. Mr. Phil Rosenfelt, the Deputy General Counsel for Program Services is currently serving as the acting Secretary of Education pending the confirmation of Miguel Cardona.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler reported that the Hadley School for the Blind has several videos online that demonstrate how to do certain common everyday tasks.**

**Announcements**

**Ms. Olson clarified that the**[**New England Consortium on Deafblindess (NEC)**](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.perkins.org%2Fservices%2Fnec%2Fabout&data=04%7C01%7CLisa.Tanguay%40ct.gov%7Cce7cb91ec78447e4452b08d8c21d9975%7C118b7cfaa3dd48b9b02631ff69bb738b%7C0%7C0%7C637472779679303945%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=qHZn5px8Q8F2L0VwhonnGlN2Q5s7ZBuKGhUavg1ib1I%3D&reserved=0)**has not yet held their Winter Summit on Combined Vision and Hearing Loss, which includes free virtual professional development for service providers, parents, and individuals who would like to learn more about strategies to support infants, children, and youth with combined vision and hearing loss. It will run on four consecutive Friday’s commencing on January 29th and continue on February 5th, February 12th, and February 19th. Ms. Olson will forward an announcement with more information on the summit to the committee membership. Registration can be completed at:** **NEC@Perkins.org****.**

**Mr. Sylvestre mentioned that the President’s nominee for Secretary of Education is Connecticut’s own Miguel Cardona, who presently serves as the Commissioner for the State Department of Education, and who has also worked with public housing. Mr. Sylvestre further shared that Commissioner Cardona’s personal experiences will serve him well going forward.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:14 p.m., seconded by Ms. Miles. Motion passed.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE: April 27, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.**