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

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

**Deafblind Advisory Committee (DBAC)**

**Draft Meeting Minutes**

**October 27, 2020**

**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; Brian Sigman, ADS-BESB Director**

**Voting Members Absent**

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

**Non-voting Members absent**

**Others Present**

**Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS; Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative Liaison; Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services, 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 June 9, 2020**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre made a motion to adopt the July 28, 2020 minutes, seconded by Mr. Krengel. Motion carried.**

**Old Business**

**Update on Deafblind Technology Program**

**Mr. Lassen reported on the Access Through Technology Program in the absence of Ms. Aparo. There has been no change in utilization since the fourth quarter. The last quarter’s report showed services were provided to one new consumer and to one returning consumer. There were 2 devices purchased and one device was upgraded. For FY 2020, $44,304 was expended on equipment and services. Mr. Sigman indicated that he would follow up with the contracted rehabilitation technologist who installs the equipment to confirm that he has resumed the provision of in-home services, utilizing the safety protocols.**

**New Business**

**FY 2021 1st Quarter Expenditures**

**Mr. Lassen provided an update on the services that have been rendered thus far in the current fiscal year based upon billing invoices that have been processed as of last week. Oak HiIl has not billed for any services. Communication Advocacy Network has billed for $8,144 in services to 13 clients; UCP has billed for $1,553 in services to one client; JR has billed for $2,424 in services to one client. The total for these FY 2021 billed services is $12,121. Other expenses included $1,965 for interpreters, $2,200 for braille instruction, and $4,620 for adaptive devices, for a total of $8,785. Invoices from FY 2020 that came in too late to process in that year were paid in the amount of $4,981. In all, $25,887 has been expended thus far in FY 2021. In response to questions from members on the status of services to clients from Oak Hill, Mr. Sigman will reach out to Oak Hill once more to request an update.**

**COVID-19 In-person protocols**

**Mr. Sigman acknowledged the members of the Deafblind Advisory Committee who have provided feedback and recommendations for the safety protocols to be followed for the provision of in-person services. Those protocols were issued to providers of services to deafblind individuals in September, enabling the provision of in-person services to occur within the framework of the safety protocols. These protocols are intended to augment, and not to replace any safety protocols that providers are currently utilizing. Mr. Sigman reviewed the safety protocol document in detail with the members and provided clarifications regarding the requirements for providers to utilize these protocols when providing services to BESB clients who are served through the deafblind funding.**

**Service Plan Requests**

**Mr. Lassen reported that two new requests for community inclusion services for two BESB clients with deafblindness were received from their guardians for consideration of deafblind funding. One of the client’s, D.H, would use the funding for community inclusion activities and would require facilitation of communication by a person who is familiar with ASL. The request is for 665 hours of service at the rate of $15 per hour, for a total of $9,975.00. The second request was for currently funded client J.S., who now lives in a DDS-funded group home in a residential area in New Britain. Employees of the group home who are familiar and able to communicate with J.S. would work with him on a one-to-one basis after their group home shifts ended, bringing the client out into the community for activities.  This request would bring the level of deafblind funding from $2,536 to $5,236.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved to accept the staff recommendations for clients D.H. and J.S., seconded by Ms. Miles. Motion carried.**

**Mr. Lassen also reported that CAN requested adding one new client to their existing contract. L.B. is a long-time client who resides in the Middletown area. Although client L.B. uses a guide dog within the community, the residential area is without a bus route and these funds would be used for community inclusion activities with the help of a Support Services Provider. CAN would not require additional funding to serve this client since the currently contracted funding level is sufficient to absorb these additional services.**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre motioned, seconded by Ms. Morgan, to add client L.B. to the existing CAN client list. Motion carried with 8 in favor and 2 opposing.**

**Meeting Dates for 2021**

**MOTION: Mr. Sylvestre moved, seconded by Ms. Cloonan, to accept the proposed 2021 meeting dates as January 26, April 27, July 27 and October 26. Motion carried.**

**Report from the BESB Director**

**Mr. Sigman reported that with October 15th being Blind Americans Equality Day, Aging and Disability Services Commissioner Amy Porter issued out a press release that included a link to several examples of successes in employment for individuals who are blind. Within Adult Services, the ever-popular large print calendar has been completed and is in the process of being mailed out to approximately 1,000 clients. Program staff continue to work on a series of instructional videos on how to utilize daily living aids with the goal of posting these on the agency website in the future. Due to the reduced population in most government building as a result of telework arrangements brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of Vending Facility Managers remain out of work at this time. There is a new statewide contract for vending machine services. After approximately 2 decades, Coca-Cola is no longer the contractor. PepsiCo has been awarded the new 5-year contract. The transition of vending machines from Coke to Pepsi is underway. Within the Children’s Services Program, the Fall in-service series for school district staff is underway in its new virtual format that allows for participants to attend as their schedules permit. We are anticipating this will make the training opportunities more widely available and that for the first time, educators from outside of the state can also participate. Replacement hires for recent retirees Gail Johnson, Jill Baker, and Peg Palmer have been completed. Champagne Marsh-Williams, Jessica Gibson, and Jacquie Dettore are the three new Education Consultants. Andrea Garewski retired on September 1st and a request to refill her vacancy has been submitted. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program held a virtual mentoring event in October in conjunction with National Mentoring Day, featuring 3 members of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council. Stacey-Ann Lewis has been hired to replace Jenifer Eukers as the Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) Counselor for the northern half of the state and Charlotte Copenhaver has transferred into the Pre-ETS position previously held by Mark Ward for the southern half of the state. The VR Program received $1.2 million in new funds through the federal reallotment process and with these additional dollars, the VR Program projects being able to serve all eligible individuals through FFY 2023. VR Supervisor Mary Burgard remains on extended leave so requests for assistance that would usually go to her can be sent to the BESB Director.**

**Mr. Norton reported that the agency plans to resubmit to the Governor and the Office of Policy and Management the same proposals as last session due to the fact that the state legislature had to pause and could not hold any meetings in March due to COVID-19. The proposals will request technical adjustments, such as deleting an out-of-date reference to the Department of Social Services (DSS) regarding the former Department on Aging, removing duplicative provisions within the ADS statutes, and bringing the statutes from the various bureaus of ADS together into one location of the statutes.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler shared with the committee information about a free app called Seeing A.I. which is an artificial intelligence for people who are blind. It narrates the world around you and describes nearby people, text and objects. It utilizes Optical Character Recognition software that enables users to take a picture of text, and have the app read it back with the device’s screen reader. Ms. Tyler also stressed the importance of keeping current on information regarding COVID-19 from official sources.**

**Announcements**

**Ms. Olson announced that the New England Consortium on Deafblindness is planning a virtual deafblind summit starting on January 15, 2021 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Details will follow.**

**MOTION: Ms. Miles moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:25 p.m., seconded by Ms. Flaherty Vaughn. Motion passed.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE: January 26, 2021 – 10:00 a.m.**