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

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

**Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

**Special Meeting Draft Minutes**

**July 21, 2022**

**Members Present**

**Al Sylvestre, Chairman, Eileen Akers, Beth Rival, Mary Silverberg, Stephen Thal, Matthew Fazzino (representing the DSS Commissioner), Andrea Giudice, Randa Utter**

**Members Absent**

**Samuel Pride, Katherine Guzman, Steven Famiglietti**

**Others Present**

**Cheryl Cepelak, BESB Interim Director, Mary Burgard, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor, Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator, Zachary Moore, Vocational Rehabilitation Secretary**

**Public Present**

**Nathanael Wales, National Federation of the Blind**

**Welcome and Introductions**

**Chairman Sylvestre called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.**

**New Business**

**Formation of Workgroups**

**Employment and Training: Chairman Sylvestre stated that the purpose of this workgroup is to work closely with the Vocational Rehabilitation program to gain a better understanding of what options are available for client employment and training opportunities, with a specific interest in technology.**

**Chairman Sylvestre requested that any board members interested in participating in this work group identify themselves.**

**Ms. Akers and Ms. Rival volunteered to participate in the workgroup.**

**Interim Director Cepelak asked if there is a pre-determined meeting schedule for the workgroup. Chairman Sylvestre stated that he would like scheduling to remain open-ended at this time and be under the purview of the leadership of the specific workgroups. Chairman Sylvestre would like to allow the workgroup to set their own schedules and agendas.**

**Interim Director Cepelak requested that moving forward workgroups communicate expectations with her concerning the participation of BESB staff.**

**Chairman Sylvestre indicated that ideally each group will consist of two or three members.**

**MOTION: Mr. Thal made a motion to establish an Employment and Training workgroup, seconded by Ms. Akers. The motion passed unanimously.**

**The possibility of a Technology and Accessibility workgroup was raised. Ms. Utter agreed to participate in this workgroup.**

**Chairman Sylvestre requested that Mr. Thal comment on this workgroup.**

**Mr. Thal stated that in terms of technology, there are a lot of directions this workgroup can take. Mr. Thal indicated he is concerned about how clients will be able to try equipment before it is provided to them. This can be a frustrating process for clients.**

**Mr. Thal stated that low vision services are critical. This topic relates to all BESB programs. Mr. Thal noted there have been many changes in the field of low vision. New ways of recruiting low vision providers need to be explored.**

**Mr. Thal stated that several low vision providers that are currently utilized do not want to provide prescription services. This is something that should be addressed.**

**Mr. Thal asked Ms. Burgard if additional comparable benefit sources are reviewed when clients are sent to low vision providers. Ms. Burgard responded that the Vocational Rehabilitation program does not require documentation of comparable benefits. However, employers are strongly encouraged to provide as much assistance as possible to meet the needs of clients.**

**Ms. Burgard noted that there is a BESB Vocational Rehabilitation State Plan initiative which addresses updating equipment in the BESB technology lab to allow clients to try equipment before it is provided. Recently, additional equipment has been purchased for the technology lab to provide this service.**

**Ms. Burgard clarified that although this equipment has been purchased by the Vocational Rehabilitation program, other BESB programs are permitted to utilize the equipment.**

**Ms. Rival asked Ms. Burgard who is providing technology training to clients. Ms. Burgard reported that BESB currently utilizes a staff member who provides clients who are students with technology training and a Rehabilitation Technologist who works in the southern portion of the state to provide training. The Vocational Rehabilitation program is currently working to hire an additional staff member to meet this need as well.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers made a motion to establish a Technology and Accessibility workgroup, seconded by Ms. Rival. Discussion continued; the motion was not voted on.**

**Mr. Thal noted that a low vision group currently exists and questioned if this topic should be included in the Technology and Accessibility workgroup being proposed or remain separate.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers made a motion to establish a Low Vision workgroup, seconded by Mr. Thal. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Mr. Thal volunteered to head this workgroup; Ms. Silverberg volunteered to participate in this workgroup.**

**Mr. Thal noted that he will be asking BESB staff who have been working to address this issue to participate in this workgroup as well.**

**MOTION: Ms. Giudice made a motion to establish a Technology and Accessibility workgroup, seconded by Ms. Utter. The motion passed unanimously.**

**The possibility of an Education Services workgroup was raised. Ms. Guzman was asked to head this workgroup by Chairman Sylvestre prior to this meeting. Ms. Guzman was not present at this meeting.**

**Chairman Sylvestre invited Ms. Akers to comment based on her experience. Ms. Akers noted that while she would like to participate, she cannot take on an additional role.**

**Chairman Sylvestre would like this workgroup to focus on the Children’s Services program.**

**Chairman Sylvestre stated he would like to defer this conversation to the September meeting when Ms. Guzman is present.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers made a motion to defer discussion on this workgroup to the September 15, 2022, meeting, seconded by Ms. Silverberg. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Ms. Akers commented that she agrees with the scope that Chairman Sylvestre has proposed for this group. Ms. Akers noted that the scope of all the workgroups discussed could encompass many topics and that members of the Board need to be careful moving forward when considering the scope of each of the workgroups.**

**Chairman Sylvestre asked that each workgroup compose a brief statement detailing what it is the workgroup would like to focus on and to share that statement at the September meeting.**

**Interim Director Cepelak indicated her agreement with Ms. Akers earlier statements regarding the scope of the groups.**

**Interim Director Cepelak indicated her support of these workgroups but also reminded the group of the current low levels of staff at BESB. Interim Director Cepelak asked that the Board keep the low level of bureau staff in mind related to the scope of the workgroups and their expectations of BESB staff participation.**

**Chairman Sylvestre encouraged workgroups to communicate with BESB staff, specifically supervisors, to ensure workgroup effectiveness.**

**Chairman Sylvestre noted that one reason this meeting was called is because the future direction of BESB is being clarified at this moment in time and engagement is essential.**

**Interim Director Cepelak stated that engaging this group is a wonderful resource. Interim Director Cepelak assured this group that there is no planning happening related to BESB that has not been communicated.**

**Mr. Thal requested that workgroup chairs be identified before the end of this meeting.**

**Mr. Thal will chair the Low Vision workgroup.**

**Ms. Rival will chair the Employment and Training workgroup.**

**Ms. Utter will chair the Technology and Accessibility workgroup.**

**The Education Services workgroup discussion has been deferred to the September 15, 2022, meeting. No chair has been assigned.**

**Bureau Structure: Chairman Sylvestre stated he envisions this workgroup functioning as a broad discussion regarding how the current structure of BESB is working for the blind community and how communication works.**

**Mr. Thal requested that members of this group be provided with a document detailing the current organizational structures.**

**Chairman Sylvestre asked Interim Director Cepelak if a copy of the bureau structure could be provided.**

**Interim Director Cepelak requested this conversation be deferred so that an updated organizational structure can be provided. An older version of a structural organizational chart can be provided but will need to be updated.**

**Interim Director Cepelak noted that the scope for this workgroup will need to be clearly defined.**

**Chairman Sylvestre stated his belief that this discussion should be deferred.**

**Mr. Thal stated that as workgroups develop the knowledge of organizational structure will be helpful information.**

**Interim Director Cepelak reiterated that she will be providing the current organizational chart that needs to be updated for reference.**

**Mr. Thal clarified that he is requesting an organizational structure work chart for the entirety of ADS.**

**Interim Director Cepelak noted that she is returning part-time to BESB after retiring. She also stated that email is the best way to contact her so that she can schedule time to speak.**

**Interim Director Cepelak will be sharing her email address with members of this group and requested that this information be noted in the minutes.**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg made a motion to establish a Bureau Structure workgroup, seconded by Ms. Rival. The motion passed unanimously.**

**MOTION: Ms. Akers made a motion to defer discussion on the Bureau Structure workgroup to the September 15, 2022, meeting, seconded by Mr. Thal. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Access to MyChart Online Service**

**Chairman Sylvestre noted that there are accessibility issues related to MyChart services.**

**Ms. Rival noted that it is extremely difficult to utilize this service to schedule appointments, manage confirmations, manage medications, fill out forms, and access COVID-19 protocols.**

**Ms. Akers reported she has polled members of the American Council for the Blind in Connecticut related to MyChart Plus. Three of four people who responded stated they were able to utilize the program to the point that they were interested in using it.**

**Ms. Akers reported that she believes MyChart is a very difficult application to use, although she has not utilized it personally.**

**Ms. Silverberg stated that she has utilized MyChart. Ms. Silverberg noted that MyChart works for her. Ms. Silverberg agreed with Ms. Rival that the requests to complete MyChart tasks prior to an appointment are difficult. Ms. Silverberg noted that going into an office early to fill out paperwork is not the most accessible choice either.**

**Ms. Silverberg noted using MyChart takes a long time with the help of assistive technology, such as screen readers. Although MyChart can be difficult, Ms. Silverberg prefers using MyChart to fill paperwork out rather than doing so in an office. Ms. Silverberg noted that both MyChart and filling out paperwork in offices present their own challenges.**

**Ms. Utter shared that often text messages from doctor offices are difficult to utilize as well.**

**Chairman Sylvestre noted that for changes to be made to MyChart and doctor office visits, community outreach and change at a higher level than this group would be necessary. Chairman Sylvestre stated that communicating with outside entities and leaders of organizations would be necessary to enact change.**

**Ms. Giudice commented that she can relate to the frustrations noted by members of this group.**

**Ms. Rival noted that there is interest in this topic.**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg motioned to establish a workgroup to study MyChart accessibility, seconded by Ms. Giudice. No vote on the motion was held, discussion continued.**

**Ms. Akers expressed her concern related to the fact that this conversation goes beyond MyChart alone. Ms. Utter expressed her agreement.**

**Ms. Burgard noted that MyChart is a smaller part of a program called Epic. Ms. Burgard shared that a lawsuit related to MyChart/Epic and accessibility issues has failed in the past. Ms. Burgard stated that at a doctor’s office a reasonable accommodation to MyChart must be provided, if necessary, but MyChart does not necessarily have to be changed. If MyChart is inaccessible to an individual, an accommodation should be provided.**

**Mr. Wales shared that he has utilized MyChart and has found the accessibility level to be usable. Mr. Wales noted that the ability to access MyChart is variable. Mr. Wales noted that this is a broad issue and that an attempt to sue Epic did occur based on accessibility issues. Mr. Wales encouraged the members of the board to consider what medical services such as Yale and Hartford Health are doing with MyChart related to accessibility. The value of having discussions with relevant staff was expressed by Mr. Wales.**

**Ms. Rival stated that this topic should be discussed in September at the next meeting. Before this could be determined a vote on the previous motion made by Ms. Silverberg, seconded by Ms. Giudice, was held to determine if a workgroup would be established.**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg motioned to establish a workgroup to study MyChart accessibility, seconded by Ms. Giudice. Two members agreed and six members disagreed; the motion did not pass.**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg motioned to continue discussion related to MyChart accessibility at the September 15, 2022, meeting, seconded by Ms. Rival. No vote was required.**

**Public Comment**

**Mr. Wales commented that, related to BESB structure, this group should continue to observe best practices outside of Connecticut.**

**Ms. St. Amand reminded group members that time spent on Board work qualifies as volunteer time. Ms. St. Amand requested that a tally of volunteer hours spent by Board members be provided to her by the chairman before or at the next meeting.**

**Mr. Thal requested that staff at BESB receive thanks for the work they are doing.**

**Chairman Sylvestre requested that Interim Director Cepelak ensure that staff of BESB are aware that their efforts are appreciated and to encourage staff to reach out to the Board with any concerns.**

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: Ms. Silverberg motioned to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Sylvestre declared the meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.**

**Next regular meeting: September 15, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.**