**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  
Meeting Draft Minutes  
December 14, 2023  
  
Members Present  
Al Sylvestre, Chair; Eileen Akers; Mary Silverberg; Samuel Pride;** **Stephen Thal  
  
Members Absent  
Astread Ferron-Poole; Andrea Guidice; Katherine Guzman; Beth Rival  
  
Others Present  
Carol Jenkins, BESB Director; Tyrell Sampson, Supervisor, Business Enterprise Program; Mary Burgard, Supervisor, Vocational Rehabilitation; Chris Lassen, Supervisor, Adult Services; Catherine Summ, Supervisor, Children’s Services; Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator; Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison, ADS; Lisa Drew, BESB Administrative Assistant; Rayah Martin BESB clerical staff  
  
Public Present  
Mikaela Zito, CT Ambassador, Usher Syndrome Coalition; Phil Magalnick, Chair, State Rehabilitation Council; Wendy Lusk, Executive Director for the Center of the Blind in New London; Tammy Paradis  
  
Welcome and Introductions  
Chair Al Sylvestre called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM, noting the lack of a quorum.**

**Chair Sylvestre called for a moment to remember Steve Famiglietti who passed away a year ago in a car crash. This raises the issue of street safety still being a concern, especially for those persons with disabilities.   
  
Public Comment  
Phil Magalnick reported that he is a member of the Stamford Vision Zero task force. There are chapters throughout the state who are working on traffic safety issues. Members of the public can inquire of their town’s mayor or first selectman to inquire about the existence of a task force in their locality.**

**Chair Sylvestre added that West Hartford has a robust Vision Zero. They have been awarded a federal grant to conduct a pilot program that involves the installation of 15-speed control cameras.**

**Samuel Pride, a member of the ADA committee in Norwalk, is involved in implementing audible traffic crossing signals in the area.**

**This technological advancement will help to mitigate the risk of accidents and promote a safer, more inclusive environment for all pedestrians.  
  
Old Business  
Minutes from the September 21, 2023 Meeting  
Tabled for lack of a quorum.**

**New Business  
None  
  
Work Group Reports  
Blind Americans Equality Day  
Chair Sylvestre delivered a favorable appraisal of the event, highlighting the positive feedback received by attendees. The event proved to be an effective platform to showcase the capabilities of BESB, providing valuable insights for individuals navigating blindness.**

**Administrative Items  
  
Progress on filling vacant and anticipated positions   
Director Jenkins has provided an update stating that BESB has two vacancies. The positions are Rehabilitation Technology Teachers and a Secretary 1 position.**

**The interviews for Rehabilitation Technology Teachers have been concluded and the selected candidate should be announced soon. Meanwhile, applications for Secretary 1 position are being received and the interview process is expected to commence shortly.  
  
Report from the Director  
Director Jenkins provided an update on the implementation of a phone tree feature for the primary BESB phone line, which will include a Spanish language option. The feature is expected to be operational in the near future, with an anticipated launch date early in the new year.**

**The calendars with large print have been distributed, and Consumers have given positive feedback regarding the additional resource information on the back.**

**Director Jenkins and Mary Burgard attended the fall conferences of the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. Director Jenkins reported during the conferences, that there were several interesting topics, including DEIA (Disability, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility), Branding, and Artificial Intelligence. It's worth noting that CT ranked among the top-performing agencies in terms of Exit, with a second-place ranking in the second quarter, a third-place ranking in the fourth quarter, and a first-place ranking in credential attainments.**

**The state plan for BESB for 2024-2027 is due in January and will afterward be up for public comment. The Statewide Needs Assessments Survey results have just come in, and that information will help in developing our goals.  
  
The 2023 Consumer Satisfaction Survey has concluded with a response rate of 12.8% (23 out of 180). To improve response rates, we recommend exploring the use of phone surveys instead of email. The survey results indicate middle to high satisfaction ratings in multiple areas of interest. To further improve our service, we recommend focusing on providing skill training to our staff, educating them on client rights and responsibilities, and making electronic forms more accessible.**

**Additional reported work is being done on updating state statute and policy manuals.  
  
Bureau Program Updates   
Business Enterprise Program  
Tyrell Sampson reported on the pilot vending program. It has had positive results and will likely continue long-term, providing additional opportunities. Earnings for operators are likely to be close to what they were pre-Covid. He would like to expand training on general food service business going into 2024. This would allow us to be able to exercise our first right of refusal when an opportunity comes up with short notice.**

**He is working on amending BEP regulations, updating archaic language, and making them refer to the program as it exists now.**

**Mr. Sampson reported on the new location at Camp Nett, the National Guard training facility. The micro market provides certain items other than food, such as T-shirts, and other required items for those attending the facility.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation   
Mary Burgard reported on the four recent hires in VR: The Bilingual Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the northern part of the state, Tanzania Agramonte; Rehabilitation Technologist for the northern part of the state, Elena Carbello; Transition Counselor for the northern part of the state, Stacy-Ann Lewis; and transition counselor for the southern part of the state, Paul Rivers.  
  
Ms. Burgard spoke on the performance measures report presented at the fall NCSAB/CSVR conference, where our agency made the leaderboard in three out of five measures. She provided an overview of the multiple outreach programs that took place from September to November. These were based on National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which was in October. These events were a blend of both in-person and virtual formats and covered various topics such as pre-employment transition services, mentor programs, and blind sensitivity training. There was also a televised interview with Jonathan Richmond. In addition, the BESB website now has accessible forms to facilitate referrals. There were several training events for staff, ranging from technology training to ADA basics and performance accountability. Future events are planned and spaced out in a way that allows for sufficient planning time for those who wish to attend.  
  
  
Budget Update   
Director Jenkins presented the latest budget update, which has been disseminated to all board members and is available as an addendum to these minutes.  
  
Legislative Update  
Tabled   
  
Points to the Good and Welfare  
Chair Sylvestre announced he has been appointed to the CT Public Transportation Council and, consequently, will be stepping down from his role as a member of the BESB Advisory Board. To address this change, he has proposed a special meeting at the end of January to discuss the next steps. Additionally, he reported that Stephen Thal will also be leaving the BESB Advisory Board.**

**Director Jenkins confirmed that she will ensure the timely distribution of board appointment dates and state statute information to all members ahead of the special meeting.  
  
Adjournment  
MOTION:  A motion was made by Eileen Akers to adjourn. Mary Silverberg seconded the motion.   
Chair Sylvestre adjourned the meeting at 12:02 p.m.  
  
The next meeting will be a special meeting in January, date TBD.**

**Addendum: Budget Report**

**BESB Budget Report**

December 2023

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2022**
   1. Remaining balance:  $522,421.31

Amount authorized to be liquidated:  $14,079.37

Estimated total to return:  $508,341.94

Note:  VR wasn’t fully staffed this year.  FFY 2023 will be less because VR should be fully staffed.

* 1. Supported Employment (SE) FFY 2022
     1. Part A: Adults balance to Return: $22,500
     2. Part B: Youth balance to return:  $22,500

Total:  $45,000, but it must be spent proportionately.  Must spend youth before you can spend any adult funds. These are very difficult funds to spend.

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) FFY 2023**
   1. Original FFY 23 VR Grant: $3,584,073

Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Penalty:  $444,034

VR Grant after MOE penalty:  $3,140,039

Reallotment:  $750,000

Total VR Grant with Reallotment:  $3,890,039

VR Remaining Balance: $3,339,153.12

* 1. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
     1. Pre-ETS Total 15% Reserve including Reallotment:  $583,505.85
     2. Pre-ETS Remaining Reserve:  $554,418.89
  2. Supported Employment (SE) FFY 2023
     1. Part A: Adult Remaining balance: $2,672.00
     2. Part B: Youth Remaining balance:  $22,156.20

1. **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**
   1. Remaining Balance:  $2,996,384.19
2. **Independent Living/Older Blind (IL/OB) FFY 2023 (Adults Over Age 55)**
   1. Beginning balance:  $361,314.00
   2. Remaining balance: $228,245.30
3. **Independent Living (IL) SFY 2024 (Adults Under Age 55)**
   1. Beginning balance:  $22,424.00
   2. Remaining balance: $11,958.23
4. **Children’s Services SFY 2024**
   1. Beginning balance: $2,413,704.00
   2. Remaining balance: $632,003.98