**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  
  
September 21, 2023  
  
Members Present  
Mr. Al Sylvestre, Chair; Ms. Andrea Guidice; Ms. Eileen Akers; Ms. Katherine Guzman; Ms. Beth Rival; Mr. Stephan Thal; Ms. Mary Silverberg;   
Members Absent  
Mr. Samuel Pride, Ms. Astread Ferron-Poole**

**Others Present  
Ms. Carol Jenkins, BESB Director; Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Vending Facility Supervisor; Mr. Chris Lassen, Adult Services Supervisor; Ms. Catherine Summ, Children’s Services Supervisor; Ms. Lori St. Amand, Volunteer Program Coordinator; Ms. Jennifer Proto, Legislative Liaison; Ms. Lisa Drew, BESB Administrative Assistant.**

**Representing Ms. Astread Ferron-Poole, Mr. Anthony Spence, Department of Social Services**

**None  
  
Welcome and Introductions  
Chair Al Sylvestre called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.  
  
Public Comment  
None   
  
Old Business  
Minutes from the June 15, 2023 Meeting  
MOTION: A Motion was made by Ms. Mary Silverberg to adopt the minutes.  
SECONDED by Ms. Beth Rival   
CORRECTIONS: Ms. Eileen Akers corrected the spelling of her name, and Jennifer Proto corrected the date of the biennium budget bill to be in effect already as of July 1, 2023.  
VOTE: Chair Sylvestre asked for a roll call vote to approve the minutes as corrected. The minutes were approved by unanimous vote.  
  
New Business  
Proposed meeting dates for 2024:**

**Thursdays: March 21, June 20, September 19 and December 19  
MOTION: Ms. Eileen Akers moved to accept the meeting dates for 2024  
SECOND: Ms. Andrea Giudice seconded  
With no objection, the meeting dates were adopted.  
  
Work Group Reports  
  
Blind Americans Equality Day  
Chair Sylvestre gave a report on the planning for the event, which is scheduled for Friday, October 13th, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.  
  
There will be a reading of the proclamation in honor of Blind Americans Equality Day, and there will be two panel discussions, one on Pre-Employment Transition Services and one on Usher Syndrome. They will also acknowledge Disabled Americans Employment Month.**

**Mr. Stephen Thal added that the event would be held in the Department of Social Services Training room at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB). The workgroup will be meeting again to finalize details, including whether virtual participation will be available.**

**Administrative Items  
  
Progress on filling vacant and anticipated positions   
Director Jenkins reported that since the last meeting, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) has hired a few new people. In Vocational** **Rehabilitation, Elena Caraballo has been hired for the Technology Rehabilitation Teacher position, and Tanzania Agramonte has been hired for the Bilingual Counselor position. Rayah Martin was recently hired for the Processing Technician position, so the Secretary 1 position she is vacating will need to be filled. The Interviews were held for the Transition Counselor, and they are awaiting approval of that hire. The Rehabilitation Technology position for Adult Services will be reposted.  
  
Report from the Director  
Director Jenkins reported on the status of the Low Vision Provider List, and a new Low Vision Provider has been added.  
  
ADS is getting a new logo. The options were sent out to be voted on, and the new logo should be revealed sometime in October.  
  
The Consumer Statewide Needs Assessment survey and the Vocational Rehabilitation Consumer Satisfaction Survey have been sent out. A question was asked about how to have input if one has problems using SurveyMonkey. Director Jenkins said to let her know so she could have someone from Connecticut Central State University (CCSU) reach out,** **and the survey can be done over the phone. The survey does work with Jaws and screenreaders.**

**The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) IT Group is still working on setting up the automated phone tree message.**

**Bureau Program Updates   
  
Adult Services  
Chris Lassen reported that Gary Allen has joined Adult Services as their first ever Rehabilitation Technologist. They did not find suitable candidates for the Rehabilitation Teacher position and instead have reclassified the position and are seeking a second Rehabilitation Technologist.  
  
Currently, the Adult Services staff has four Social Workers, three Mobility Instructors, three Rehabilitation Teachers, and one Rehabilitation Technologist, with recruitment for a second underway.  
  
Work continues with the Older Individuals with Blindness Technical Assistance Center. Goals include revision of the Adult Service Policy and Procedure Manual, creation of a client satisfaction survey, and development of a universal assessment tool for field staff.**

**Adult Services is working with the IT Group on creating an electronically fillable Eye Report form.  
  
Mr. Lassen reported further on collaborations between Adult Services staff within the program and with other programs inside and outside of The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB).  
  
Lori St. Amand gave an update on the status of the Low Vision calendars and website review. With the website, they are trying to move away from an organizational layout and make it more driven by user needs.  
  
Children’s Services  
Catherine Summ reported on** **Children's Services staffing, including new hire Anna-Kaye Pascarelli, who is the new Quality Control Reviewer. The Children's Services currently has 29 Education Consultants, three O&M Instructors, and one Rehabilitation Instructor. There are 17 itinerant teachers as well, who are employed by cities or towns. We have 916 active children’s services clients.  
  
Ms. Summ also reported on programs that have been held for children, including music, nature, and life skills programs, as well as events at Mystic Seaport and the Beardsley Zoo. The Children's Services held programs for learning about FIDELCO and practicing cane skills.  
  
In addition to consumer programs, Children Services continues to work on professional development programs for staff. She also discussed Michelle Zordan’s work on the JotForms rollout and the work that has been done in expanding the use of the application for streamlining workflow.  
  
The Board discussed the possibility of doing some fire safety programs and emergency planning. Also, an astronomy program for the blind was suggested.  
  
Budget Update   
Director Jenkins provided the budget update. In Vocational Rehabilitation, we are in quarter eight of the federal fiscal year 2022 because we were allowed to carry over the grant. For Adult Services, we run on both the state fiscal year and federal fiscal year. The first quarter installment was a little over $7,000, and some of those funds have been used. In the Older Individuals Who Are Blind grant, we started with $24,000 and have $1,000 or less remaining. In Children’s services, the year’s allotment was about $4.9 million, and the surplus is down to about $200,000, with a few more expenditures coming.  
  
Legislative Update  
Ms. Proto gave an update on planning for the upcoming legislative session. In even-numbered years, it is a short session, and bills are restricted to budgetary and financial matters, any subject proposed by a legislative committee, and anything certified as an emergency by the House Speaker and Senate President Pro Tempore. OPM has also modified the submission process to include two new questions: the first being how the proposal connects to agencies’ 10-year visions and the second being how agencies will measure whether the proposal accomplishes its goals.  
  
She reported that the workgroup studying the elderly nutrition program (Meals on Wheels) is holding its second meeting next week. The group studying minimum standards for the timely repair of motorized wheelchairs has met twice, and the Accessible Parking Advisory Council is still gathering appointments to the council and has not met yet.  
The position for Dementia Coordinator was posted, and candidates are being screened. The Interviews should be held soon.**

**The Board held additional discussion regarding accessible parking placards and the charge of the workgroup in studying them.**

**Points to the Good and Welfare  
Chair Sylvestre reminded board members to get approval from BESB supervisors to utilize any BESB staff in projects that will further BESB’s mission. He also requested that Board members who attend the meeting on camera remain on camera during the meeting with microphones muted when not speaking.  
  
The Board discussed improvements in scheduling blind staff with Special Assistants.  
  
The Board discussed meeting attendance and how to approach members regarding the statutes and guidelines regarding voluntary service.  
  
Adjournment  
MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Mary Silverberg to adjourn.   
With no objection, seconded by Mr. Stephen Thal. Chair Sylvestre adjourned the meeting.**

**The meeting adjourned at 11:51 a.m.**

**The next meeting will be held on Thursday, December 14, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.**