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

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

**Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors**

**Minutes for March 7, 2023**

**Welcome and Roll Call: Mr. Tyrell Sampson called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.**

**Committee Members Present: Chairman Mr. Keith Haley, Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia, Mr. Frank Roberts, Mr. David Pelaggi, Mr. Angel Torres, Mr. Amos Fatorma, Mr. Karan Punjabi, Ms. Brandy Altergott**

**Committee Members Absent: Ms. Sovey Ramirez,**

**Agency Staff Present: Mr. Tyrell Sampson, Director Carol Jenkins, Ms. Jessie Towle, Mr. Joel Garcia, Mr. David Walshe, LaTonya Major**

**Others Present: Yolanda Doak, Shelly McDermott**

**Welcome ADS BESB Director Carol Jenkins**

1. **Sampson introduced Director Carol Jenkins as the new Director for BESB.**

**Director Carol Jenkins shared that she is from Nebraska and oversaw the Business Enterprise Program.**

**Old Business**

**a) Review and Approval of Minutes - December 22, 2022 (Revised Copy):**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Mr. Frank Roberts and seconded by Mr. David Pelaggi to adopt the revised copy of the December 22, 2022, meeting minutes, with one amendment as presented. The motion carried unanimously.**

**b) Budget update:**

**Mr. Sampson reported that there are approximately $2.2 million in programmatic funds. He explained that BEP is heading into year three of the five-year contract with Pepsi. A meeting will take place next week to discuss the annual overview of the business and any concerns with the current agreement.**

**c) Business Reports, Schedule C, Retirement Contribution update:**

**Mr. Sampson announced that Schedule C, Retirement Contribution, and Business reports remain outstanding. He suggested that they be turned in as soon as possible. Failure to send these reports could harm those who are delinquent.**

**d) Promotion and Transfer Applications – Committee Approval:**

**Mr. Sampson communicated that he met with Chairman Keith Haley and Vice Chairman Rich Braccia to review the applicants for 2023.**

**All thirteen applicants were acknowledged to be in good standing.**

**A motion was made by Vice Chairman Rich Braccia and seconded by Frank Roberts to accept the promotion transfer list for the upcoming year.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**New Business**

**a) Operator Spotlight**

**Mr. Sampson announced Operator Mr. Mike Heaney as receiving the spotlight acknowledgment. Mr. Heaney is the operator of the Connecticut Valley Hospital gift shop. This location was closed for some time due to COVID. The gift shop was able to resume last year after Mike and Joel identified ways to make the operation profitable by adding resalable items and increasing pricing, significantly increasing the earnings at this location.**

**b) Community Colleges First Right of Refusal Committee Determination**

**The community college food service contracts will expire on June 1, 2023.**

**Quinebaug Community College and Middlesex Community College have reached out regarding the potential setup of micro markets in place of over-the-counter cafeterias.**

**Mr. Sampson requests the committee to vote regarding exercising the committee's first right opportunity for the following community college's over-the-counter food service operations: Three Rivers CC, Housatonic CC, Capital CC, and Naugatuck Valley CC.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Roberts and seconded by Mr. Dave Pelaggi to waive all four over-the-counter cafeteria operations while maintaining vending rights and offering each college the option of a micro-market setup should the college accept.**

**Mr. Sampson requested that the committee vote to accept Middlesex Community College and Quinebaug Community College as micro-markets if they confirm 100% interest.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Rich Braccia and seconded by Ms. Brandy Altergott to accept Middlesex Community College and Quinebaug Community College as micro-markets if they confirm 100% interest. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Gateway Community College's over-the-counter food service operation. A site survey was conducted, and it is believed to be operated by a small food service company and does not appear to be large or lucrative. It is noted in the site survey that anyone interested in this location would have to be very involved and experienced. Currently, there are no interests in this location within the program.**

**A motion was made by Ms. Brandy Altergott and seconded by Mr. Dave Pelaggi to waive Gateway Community College's over-the-counter food service operation but retain the rights to vending as well as rights to future micro-market opportunities. The motion carried unanimously.**

**c) New Britain Courthouse – Update**

**Mr. Sampson shared they are working with a VR client referral for this location. Mr. Sampson expressed that should the client not complete the training, the program will need to relinquish the program's first right.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Roberts and seconded by Ms. Altergott to waive New Britain Courthouse if the current trainee does not work out and retain the vending rights and rights to future micro-market opportunities. The motion carried unanimously.**

**d) Bridgeport Mental Health – Update**

**Mr. Sampson reported that three VR clients, one individual and a couple, showed interest in this location. We could not successfully complete training on behalf of resumption for an over-the-counter opportunity at this location. Mr. Sampson suggested that the committee waive this location and retain the vending rights due to needing help finding a viable operator.**

**A motion was made by Ms. Altergott and seconded by Mr. Angel Torres to waive the rights to this location and retain the vending rights and rights to future micro-market opportunities. The motion carried unanimously.**

**e) Vending Route Partnership (Pilot)**

**Mr. Sampson shared that he has written a proposal with the assistance of Tracy Morin and Director Carol Jenkins, offering a pilot vending partnership opportunity to ten individuals currently on the transfer and promotion list. Mr. Sampson will send the vending route proposal to the committee for review and consideration.**

**Mr. Sampson requests that the committee members review the Vice Chairman or Chairman with any questions.**

**Mr. Sampson also stated that this opportunity could expand beyond the twelve-month pilot. The goal is to identify the budget and be in a position to expand on opportunities.**

**f) Operator profit/average sale increase – update**

**Mr. Sampson reported that several operators had been identified to have increases in profitability in comparison to their 2022 of excess of 10%. The following operators have been identified: Mike Heany, Tony Ford, Shelly McDermott, Frank Roberts, Barbara Miller, Keith Haley, Brandy Altergott & Angel Torres.**

**g) Vacation payment – Committee update**

**The committee proposed facilities that operate daily; you will receive 100%. If you are in a partnership and only run the operation two or three days a week, you will receive 50%. Operator primary locations will be used for consideration.**

**A motion was made by Mr. Rich Braccia and seconded by Ms. Brandy Altergott to accept the terms of the field representative vacation pay. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Agency Matters**

**a) Agency Updates**

**Due to the influx of retirements, the agency is refilling positions in Vocational Rehabilitation, Children's Services, and Adult Services.**

**Open Forum**

**Mr. Sampson provided updated information regarding the vending at Danbury Federal Prison. It appears that the vending rights were waived. Currently, we are not receiving any direct commission from the vending machines.**

**The last time we received 30% commission share was September 2019. Mr. Sampson reached out to the Danbury Federal Correction to inquire about payments and to gather information regarding past waivers. Mr. Sampson was informed by the Warden secretary that the vending machine rights were included in the previous waiver that involved a vending opportunity provided to a gentleman by the name of Wayne Sestak.**

**Mr. Sampson identified that the 30% payments were received prior to September 2019 and these payments were being forwarded by the Danbury Federal Employee Club. The 30% received was being paid by the employee club and was not a 30% commission share from the vending machines.**

**Mr. Sampson informed the Warden’s secretary that we received guidance from RSA and requested an existing contract to review the details.**

**Mr. Sampson also stated that he would like to be in the correct position to insert our first right to possibly offer this vending route as a potential opportunity.**

**The payment received in September 2019 was for the period of July, August and September. It was also discovered that they did not receive any vending income during the two-year period of Covid, due to the vending machines being shut down. The Warden’s secretary will reach out to the contractor to inquire about outstanding payments.**

**Mr. Sampson is looking to retain this vending opportunity as a future vending opportunity and foresee it as a lucrative opportunity.**

**Mr. Sampson also stated that the first order of business would be to establish the first rights and to completely remove the employee club out of the equation. This would double the profits of the share percentage.**

**Mr. Sampson will look to have a site survey conducted to establish safety concerns and operator roles and responsibilities.**

**Mr. Sampson will also figure out the roles, responsibilities and safety factors before presenting the proposed opportunity to the committee. He also shared that he discussed some of the information with Director Jenkins, and she was able to provide valuable insight. Carol also acknowledged the safety concerns and shared her experiences that were common in Nebraska.**

**Mr. Pelaggi inquired about the pension and if there were changes in the amount of contributions.**

**Mr. Sampson responded that retirement division dictates the rate change and will send an email out with the current rates. The option to be grandfathered in will be giving if the rate changes. He also explained the retirement options for state employees.**

**Mr. Roberts commented on the reaction from other states regarding allowing others running their program. He also acknowledged that it is important for the committee to collaborate and offer the opinion of the blind operator. He expressed that this is a good program and offered gratitude for all the work Mr. Sampson put into this program.**

**Mr. Sampson shared the details of a meeting he had with RSA and stated that the program is in a great position with leaps and bounds. Currently, we are headed in a great situation and he is proud to be a part of this program. Mr. Sampson also shared that there are positive responses from other states on how our program is handled in Connecticut. Mr. Sampson is hopeful that we will continue to do great things. Mr. Sampson also encouraged operators to take on new opportunities and position yourself for expansion.**

**Director Carol stated that she comes from a BEP program that was very small and historically not managed well. She stated that this program is a gold mine, and the operators are fortunate to be a part of this program. Carol also gave a history of the hardships Nebraska faced. She stated that she hated waiving facilities that could be lucrative and so many opportunities were lost because of funding. Carol expressed that the opportunities in Connecticut are grand and includes incredible audiences.**

**Carol declared that this is not the SLA’s meeting, this meeting is for the committee of blind vendors. Carol also challenged the committee to start facilitating their own meetings, start completing the agendas and only pursue Mr. Sampson for report purposes. She encouraged the committee to take ownership because the program is yours.**

**Mr. Sampson stated that this program is in a good place and should not be disrupted. It’s important to build off of where we are going for long-term success.**

**Adjournment: A motion was made by Mr. Frank Roberts and seconded by Mr. Dave Pelaggi to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 5:02**