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

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

**Deafblind Advisory Committee (DBAC)**

**Meeting Minutes**

**January 28, 2020**

**Voting Members Present**

**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; Tracy Luiselli, New England Consortium on Deafblindness (NEC); 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, BESB Children’s Services; Krystal Kelly, BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Chris Lassen, BESB Adult Services; Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative Liaison; Karen Olson, New England Consortium on Deafblindness; Brian Sigman, BESB Director**

**Voting Members Absent**

**Still Fowler, Oak Hill; Emily Morgante, Parent/Guardian Representative**

**Others Present**

**Susan Shatney, Counselor for the Deaf, ADS-BRS Community Living Program; Susan Pedersen, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN); Pattie Wilson, SSP; Tara Brown-Ogilvie, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC); Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD)**

**Introductions**

**Those present introduced themselves.**

**Approval of Minutes from October 22, 2019**

**Ms. Miles made a motion, seconded by Ms. Morgan, to accept the modification to the minutes of October 22, 2019 to reflect the following corrections: change “New England Consortium of Deafblind Technical Assistance and Training” to “New England Consortium on Deafblindness (NEC)”; under the Announcements section, change “$53,000” to “$63,000” for the amount allocated for the Department of Aging and Disability Services to hire a person to coordinate services for individuals who are deaf. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Update on FY 20 Community Inclusion Funding Utilization**

**Mr. Sigman provided a detailed overview on the status of the funding utilization for the current fiscal year. There was $265,269 appropriated for community inclusion services for individuals who are deafblind. Thus far $68,882 has been utilized. For Oak Hill, out of 32 clients who are eligible to receive community inclusion funding, services have been provided to 11 clients through December, totaling $10,742 in expenditures, or 17% of the contracted amount. For CAN, out of 18 clients who are eligible to receive funding, services have been provided to 16 clients through December, 4 of whom were funded through the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds. For the 12 clients receiving funding from the community inclusion appropriation, $37,352 has been expended through December, representing 29% of the contracted community inclusion funding. Three vendors who each received contracts of approximately $10,000 have expended 40%, 46% and 66% respectively through December. One vendor who was allocated $7,055 for the year has only utilized 4% through December.**

**Mr. Sigman expressed concern that based on current utilization rates through the first half of the fiscal year, the allotment will be underutilized once again. Mr. Sigman reviewed a proposal from CAN for some group field trips and he wondered if they could collaborate with Oak Hill to develop joint field trips.**

**Mr. Sylvestre made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cloonan, to authorize CAN to develop a budget designated for field trips. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Tara Brown-Ogilvie from the Helen Keller National Center offered to explore if the Confident Living Program could be provided this year, either at the center’s location in New York or in Connecticut.**

**Deafblind Technology Program**

**Mr. Lassen reported on the Access Through Technology Program. There is $123,994 allocated for this fiscal year. Expenditures for the last two quarters totaled $18,504. From October through December, 6 individuals that were all previous consumers of the program were served. Two applications are pending additional information to determine eligibility. Efforts are underway to work with Communication Advocacy Network to sponsor an event for members of the deafblind community in the spring or summer.**

**New Business**

**Committee Membership Update**

**Mr. Sigman reported that two voting member replacements for Dee Spinkston from HKNC and Meagan Geary from ASD require the committee’s action. Ms. Tara Brown-Ogilvie would replace Ms. Spinkston as the HKNC representative, and Mr. Jessie Stanley would replace Ms. Geary as the ASD representative.**

**Mr. Sylvestre made a motion, seconded by Ms. Morgan to accept Mr. Stanley and Ms. Brown-Ogilvie as voting members of the Deafblind Advisory Committee. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Summary of December 6, 2019 meeting of Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

**Mr. Sigman reported that he attended the December 6th meeting of the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and provided a summary on some of the issues that were raised. One question asked of him at this meeting was regarding the $10,000 cap on services. He clarified that the $10,000 cap only applies to the appropriation for community inclusion services and relatively few individuals are affected by this cap. These individuals remain eligible to receive independent living services from BESB.**

**Mr. Sigman stated that another topic of discussion was the availability of interpreters. Ms. Flaherty Vaughn stated this continues to be a concern amongst the community of individuals who are deaf. Recommendations regarding more frequent training of new bus drivers was also raised and Mr. Sigman affirmed that BESB staff do provide training to new bus drivers of CT Transit. Mr. Sylvestre suggested that it would be beneficial for advocacy groups to approach transit companies separately, including railways. Ms. Shatney asked the committee to report back to her on any barriers they may encounter.**

**Another topic at the Advisory Board meeting was the plan for refilling the Human Services Advocate position that was recently vacated by the retirement of Marsha Brown. A specific recommendation to hire a person who is deafblind to fill this position was made by some of the board members. Mr. Sigman responded that no decision has been reached as to whether the refill would be in the same job classification or if there was a more fitting job title to match the current needs of the Adult Services Program at BESB. Mr. Sigman stated that when job openings become available, he distributes the announcements and anyone whose education and background qualifies for the position should consider applying. He affirmed that the State of Connecticut is an equal opportunity employer.**

**Transition Plan for Staff Assignments**

**Mr. Sigman announced that in addition to Ms. Brown, that Donna Gore has also retired. Mr. Lassen has assumed the administrative functions of both positions. BESB is examining what the critical and unfulfilled needs of the Adult Services Program are and will be putting forth recommendations to ADS Human Resources on what job titles would best meet these programmatic needs.**

**Legislative Session Proposals**

**Mr. Norton reported that second-year revisions to the Governor’s biennium budget will be unveiled on February 5th.  ADS is proposing a bill to make a few technical changes only.  The next meeting for the Advisory Board for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing is scheduled for February 7th  at 10:00 a.m. at the Legislative Office Building.**

**Report from the BESB Director**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation Section of the Unified State Plan was approved by the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired and the State Rehabilitation Council at their special meetings on January 23rd. The Bureau will now proceed with submission to the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education. Mr. Sigman stated that large print calendars will still be issued to clients but may be purchased through a vendor rather than utilizing the limited staffing resources of BESB for the development of a 2021 calendar.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler shared the story of a 13-year-old boy who received a stem cell injection in Boston which helped improve his vision. Surgery expenses were a total of $40,000 for each eye.**

**Announcements**

**Ms. Shatney announced that all of the independent living centers have hired an advocate for individuals who are deaf.**

**Adjournment**

**Mr. Sylvestre made a motion, seconded by Ms. Miles, to adjourn the meeting at noon. Motion passed unanimously.**

**NEXT MEETING: April 28, 2020 - 10:00 a.m. at BESB**