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

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

**Deafblind Advisory Committee (DBAC)**

**Meeting Minutes**

**June 9, 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); Karen Olson, New England Consortium on Deafblindness (alternate voting member for Ms. Luiselli commencing at 11:30 a.m.); Tara Brown-Ogilvie, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC); Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD); 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; Margie Santos, BESB Adult Services, Brian Sigman, BESB Director**

**Voting Members Absent**

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

**Others Present**

**Muriel Aparo; Jason Corning; Alan Gunzberg; Brenda Moore; Susan Pedersen; Lisa Tanguay**

**Introductions**

**Those present introduced themselves.**

**Approval of Minutes from January 28, 2020**

**Kathy Morgan made a motion, Barbara Cloonan seconded, to accept the minutes from the January 28, 2020 meeting as amended. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Update on Deafblind FY 20 Funding Utilization**

**Mr. Lassen provided a summary of the expenditures as of June 1, 2020. Oak Hill’s contract is in the amount of $44,897 and they have so far expended $13,577, which is just over 30% of the funds allocated. Oak Hill has served 11 of 32 contracted clients. Communication Advocacy Network (CAN) has a contract in the amount of $141,353, with $72,271, or just over 51% of the allocation expended so far. CAN has served all 17 of their contracted clients. United Cerebral Palsy of Eastern CT has a contract of $9,999 to serve one client and they have expended $6,530, or just over 65% of the allocation. There were four individuals served through purchase of services contracts. For client JH, the contracted allocation is for $7,055 and $1,089, or 15% has been expended. Client AJ has a contracted allocation of $9,987, with $7,191, or 72% expended. Client JS has a contracted allocation of $2,536 with $1,663, or just under 66% expended. Client JR has a contracted allocation of $9,999 with $9,980 expended. Total expenditures for community inclusion services so far are $112,301 for FY 20. Of the 54 clients eligible to receive contracted services, a total of 33 clients have been served so far. In addition, there was $17,459 in other expenditures, of which $4,013 was utilized for ASL interpreters, $1,193 was utilized for rehabilitation technology services, $11,469 was utilized for braille instruction, and $784 was utilized for adaptive devices. To date, out of the $265,269 budget allotment, $129,760 has been expended, reflecting 49% of the FY 20 allotment.**

**Update on Deafblind Technology Program**

**Ms. Aparo reported on the Access Through Technology Program. Although applications were still being processed, services were suspended due to COVID-19 and those applications will be evaluated once services resume. There is $123,994 allocated for this fiscal year. Total expenditures for the first three fiscal quarters was $28,400. There was $70,000 reallocated back to the FCC so that those funds could be used by other States. For the third quarter of this fiscal year, services were provided to 2 individuals that are previous consumers of the program. Five devices were purchased. Presently, there are 7 approved open files pending for services. The FCC is allowing requests for PPE supplies to help with the sanitization of inventory equipment and to provide a safe environment for the consumers and evaluators once the program resumes. Chairperson Tyler made a recommendation that follow-up should be conducted with prior recipients of equipment to ensure their devices are still operational.**

**New Business**

**Community Inclusion Services through June 30, 2020**

**Mr. Sigman reported that due to the COVID 19 pandemic, services are being provided remotely through available technologies. Many community-based activities have been postponed to later dates or have been cancelled entirely. The agency recognizes the unfortunate difficulties and challenges that have resulted due to social distancing requirements, but safety must be the first priority. The agency adheres to the requirements contained in the Governor’s executive orders.**

**FY 2021 Community Inclusion Services Plans**

**Mr. Sigman reported that through collaboration with BESB’s Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Mr. Lassen has identified five individuals who can potentially benefit from services through the community inclusion funding. Mr. Lassen has scheduled a virtual meeting of the workgroup to discuss these potential recipients. As of the date of this meeting, Mr. Sigman has not been notified by Oakhill if there will be summer camps. This will be shared with the committee once he is notified.**

**COVID 19 Updates**

**Mr. Sigman reiterated that the agency takes their direction based on the Governor’s executive orders pertaining to COVID-19. The agency has been provided with masks for the few employees who are currently coming into the building and Mr. Sigman has also inquired about obtaining clear masks to be used when interacting with clients who are deafblind. Mr. Stanley inquired if anything was in process for deafblind persons due to COVID-19 and asked about thoughts of social distancing for clients with deafblindness who require close contact. Mr. Sigman stated that, to the extent possible, remote technologies should be utilized either directly or with the assistance of an SSP. Ms. Flaherty Vaughn expressed her concern on how difficult it is for individuals with deafblindness and the hard of hearing population to see interpreters on television when updates are provided to the public, which causes them to miss valuable information pertaining to COVID updates. She recommended that the agency consider hiring someone who is deafblind or hard of hearing to work directly with this population. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn also recommended that training be provided to this population regarding COVID. Mr. Corning reported that his business provides informational access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals and can provide a blog with information to keep the deafblind community abreast of the pandemic.**

**Ms. Pederson stated that CAN has SSP providers currently working with some consumers and they ensure they are wearing the proper PPE while doing so. These consumers also rely on family members for help.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton reported that the current legislative session was cut short due to COVID-19 and has officially adjourned. He also reported that the legislature anticipates short falls in revenue due to sales and income tax decreases that have resulted from the COVID pandemic.**

**Report from the BESB Director**

**Mr. Sigman deferred to Mr. Lassen who was pleased to introduce one of the newest social workers, Margie Santos, who was hired to replace Marsha Brown after her retirement. Ms. Santos is assigned to the community inclusion program as well as serving clients in the Northwestern part of Connecticut. Ms. Santos provided the committee with information on her background and professional work experience. Ms. Flaherty Vaughn expressed her disappointment that an individual with deafblindness was not hired to replace Ms. Brown and indicated that she was not aware that the position had been made available. Mr. Lassen stated that the position was filled in full compliance with state hiring regulations and that the most qualified candidate was selected.**

**Report from the Chair**

**None**

**Announcements**

**None**

**Adjournment:**

**Mr. Krengel made a motion, Karen Olson seconded to adjourn the meeting at 12:30. Motion passed unanimously.**