**Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)**

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

**Deafblind Advisory Committee Meeting**

**Minutes**

**July 23, 2019**

**Voting Members Present**

**Barbara Cloonan, Parent/Guardian Representative; Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, Deafblind Association of CT; Still Fowler, Oak Hill; Erich Krengel, Capitol Region Mental Health Clinic (DMHAS); Sandra Miles, DDS - Southbury Training School; Robert C. Smith, Department of Developmental Services; Al Sylvestre, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired; Hana Tyler, Consumer Representative**

**Non-Voting Members Present**

**Heidi Henaire, DORS-BRS; Krystal Kelly, BESB-Vocational Rehabilitation; Chris Lassen, BESB, Adult Services; Andrew Norton, DORS, Legislative Liaison; Patricia Richardson, DORS-State Unit on Aging; Brian Sigman, BESB Director**

**Voting Members Absent:**

**Tracy Luiselli, New England Consortium; Kathy Morgan, Conservator; Emily Morgante, Parent/Guardian Representative**

**Non-Voting Members Absent**

**Marsha Brown, BESB, Adult Services; Mary Johns, BESB, Children’s Services**

**Others Present**

**Susan Shatney, Counselor for the Deaf, DORS-BRS Community Living Program**

**1. Introductions:**

**Those present introduced themselves.**

**2. Old Business:**

**Approval of DBAC Minutes from April 30, 2019**

**Mr. Smith made a motion, seconded by Ms. Miles to adopt the minutes from the April 30, 2019 meeting. Motion passed with one abstention.**

**Update on Deafblind Awareness Activities**

**Ms. Lassen reported that five clients plus one family member participated in a Confident Living Program on May 2nd at BESB, facilitated by Mark Armstrong, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) Confident Living Program Coordinator. For FY 2020, HKNC has agreed to partner with BESB, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN) and the CT Tech Act to sponsor a Confident Living Program at BESB for older adults who are legally blind and who use ASL/Tactile sign. The program will feature technology training and strategies for maximizing independence.**

**BESB provided funding for transportation and supports to enable 8 clients served through CAN to visit the Statue of Liberty and other sites in New York City, as well as sites in Massachusetts and the Helen Keller National Center.**

**Deafblind Technology Program**

**Mr. Lassen reported on the purchase of adaptive technology devices and technology training to ensure communication access in the homes of clients with deafblindness.**

**For the fourth quarter of FY 2019, the Access Through Technology grant expended $12,853, providing services to 5 individuals that are all previous consumers of the program. Two new applications were received. Eight devices were purchased. The FCC has reallocated $21,300 of Connecticut’s grant funding to other states in need of additional funding. The CT Tech Act Project is a co-sponsor of the Walk & Roll in New Britain, scheduled for July 24th.**

**3. New Business:**

**FY 2019 Expenditures Outcomes**

**Mr. Sigman reported that the state appropriation for FY 2019 was $265,269 for individuals with deafblindness to receive community inclusion services. Of that appropriation, $190,746 was expended. An additional $28,367 in Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funding was expended on services to eligible clients. Analysis of the utilization rates for the contracted vendors indicated that only 76 percent of the obligated funds were expended. Mr. Sigman expressed concern about this utilization rate, noting that one vendor billed for less than half of the clients that were eligible to receive services. Another vendor served all of the eligible individuals, but their utilization rate was below 75 percent of their allocated funding. One vendor utilized only 34 percent of allocated funding due to client illness. This data illustrates the challenges that these vendors are experiencing in having sufficient staffing capacity to serve all eligible individuals and also in the availability of the eligible individuals to avail themselves of services.**

**The committee suggested having BESB determine if there are other adult clients who could benefit from services. Ms. Richardson recommended reaching out to senior centers to let them know about the available funds which may be used for clients in need of sign language interpreting to facilitate their participation in activities at those community centers. Ms. Shatney stated that she could be a resource for assisting in coordinating such initiatives.**

**Legislative Update**

**Mr. Norton provided an update on several bills of interest to the agency that passed.  Included in those bills was the name change of the agency from DORS to the Department of Aging and Disability Services which goes into effect on October 1st.**

**The plan is for the agency to be called “Aging & Disability” just as other state departments use full words rather than an acronym.  If initials are to be used, it will most likely be “ADS.”**

**Mr. Norton also described the passage of the Interpreting Standards bill. Among the provisions of this bill, it includes a definition of “deaf-blind” as “combined vision and hearing impairments that challenge a person's ability to communicate, interact with others, access information and move about safely.”**

**Report from the BESB Director**

**Mr. Sigman provided a budget update for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, expressing concern that the margin of projected carry forward funding from FFY 2020 into FFY 2021 is narrowly sufficient to cover all of the projected costs in FFY 2021. Mr. Sigman will provide an updated report at the October meeting. By then it should be known how much funding was obtained through the reallotment process.**

**The agency is in its final year of the three-year strategic plan.  Workgroups have been formed to focus on four areas which include: Technology and Service Delivery; Service and Communication; Staffing, and Interns and Volunteers. The Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired is planning some activities that will occur during the week of October 15th in conjunction with Blind Americans Equality Day. The State Rehabilitation Council has formed a workgroup to review the survey instrument currently being used to analyze the consumer satisfaction level of BESB-Vocational Rehabilitation clients.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler spoke about the Alexa device she owns and how she discovered that it can be connected to a tablet to utilize accessibility features for those who are hard of hearing.**

**Motion: Ms. Miles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Sylvestre to adjourn the meeting at 11:53 a.m.**

**NEXT MEETING: October 22, 2019 – 10:00 a.m. at BESB**