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

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

**DeafBlind Advisory Committee (DBAC)**

**Meeting by Zoom**

**Draft Meeting Minutes**

**October 25, 2022**

**Review of Meeting Protocol**

**The protocol for participation in the DeafBlind Advisory Committee (DBAC) meeting was reviewed by Mr. Lassen.**

**Voting Members Present**

**Sandra Miles, Department of Developmental Services (DDS) - Southbury Training School (STS); Wayne Seidel, Department of Developmental Services (DDS); Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD); Hana Tyler, Chair, Consumer Representative; Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, DeafBlind Support and Access Network (DBSAN); Cheri Byrnes, DeafBlind Association of Connecticut; Elise Arseneau, Oak Hill; Karen Olson, New England Consortium on Deafblindness (NEC)**

**Non-Voting Members Present**

**Cheryl Cepelak, ADS-BESB Director (interim); Christopher Lassen, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Krystal Kelly, ADS-BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Mary Johns, ADS-BESB Children’s Services; Heidi Henaire, ADS-Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS); Lucy Trusock, ADS-BRS**

**Voting Members Absent**

**Al Sylvestre, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired; Barbara Cloonan, Parent; Erich Krengel, Capitol Region Mental Health Center (DMHAS); Kathy Morgan, Guardian; Tara Brown-Ogilvie, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC)**

**Non-Voting Members Absent**

**None**

**Others Present**

**Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS; Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative Liaison; Zachary Moore, ADS-BESB; Alan Gunzburg, Member of the Public; LaTonya Major, ADS-BESB**

**Introductions**

**Chairwoman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. and asked that a roll call be taken. Mr. Moore conducted the roll call.**

**Approval of Minutes from July 26, 2022**

**Chairperson Tyler provided time for committee members to review the previous meetings minutes.**

**MOTION: Ms. Miles made a motion to adopt the July 26, 2022 minutes, seconded by Ms. Olsen. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Ms. Santos noted that minutes are sent out prior to the meeting for committee review.**

**Ms. Byrnes noted that she had reviewed the minutes prior to the meeting. Ms. Byrnes requested that the minutes continue to be distributed ahead of the meeting.**

**Ms. Santos stated that DBAC minutes are sent out a week or two prior to each meeting for committee review.**

**Mr. Stanley asked if the minutes that went out prior to the meeting are also accessible to braille users. Ms. Santos stated that if there is a request to receive the minutes in braille format then that will be filled. A request needs to be made for braille documents to be provided.**

**Ms. Byrnes noted that during the meeting she relies on an interpreter and (again) reported that she reviews the minutes after the meeting, prior to the next DBAC meeting.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn requested that individuals who are DeafBlind be provided with meeting information and materials (for example, minutes of the prior meeting and the agenda for the upcoming meeting) separately for ease of accessibility, specifically noting that email threads can be difficult to maneuver.**

**Ms. Byrnes stated she is able to follow group emails without any difficulty.**

**Old Business**

**Update on DeafBlind Technology Program**

**Ms. Santos shared an Access Through Technology (ATT) update provided by Muriel Aparo, who is not in attendance. The ATT update can be found in Appendix A of these minutes. Ms. Santos did not take questions on the ATT update, as it was Ms. Aparo who provided that information.**

**New Business**

**Expenditures Through September 30, 2022**

**Mr. Lassen reported that a new head of fiscal services (Jasmine Berry) has been hired for ADS.**

**Mr. Lassen shared that his goal is to ensure that financial reporting will be shared with committee members prior to future meetings, as a new representative is appointed by fiscal services to assist DBAC.**

**Mr. Lassen reported that DBAC expenditures total $26,888 for direct services provided to clients served under the purview of this committee through September 30, 2022.**

**For July and August, the Communication Advocacy Network (CAN) was paid $15,043. An additional $7,366 is being processed for payment to CAN as well, for services provided during the month of September.**

**Oak Hill School sent 4 clients to summer camp at Harkness in July, which resulted in an expenditure of $3,456.00.**

**1 client received direct services from UCP of Eastern Connecticut in the amount of $1,023.00.**

**Mr. Lassen noted that there are 17 clients for whom Support Service Providers (SSPs) are being sought. Mr. Lassen reported meeting this need is a work in progress. Ms. Santos shared that these 17 clients do not use American Sign Language (ASL). SSPs are required to assist these individuals. Ms. Santos is looking for SSPs who are hearing and who use spoken language. Ms. Santos asked that if any committee member is aware of any likely resources for these clients that they share them herself or Mr. Lassen.**

**Mr. Stanley asked who the clients who need SSPs are being served by at this time. Ms. Santos stated that clients are being served by CAN, Oak Hill School staff, UCP staff, or SSPs hired by individual vendors coordinating services for certain clients. Clients assigned to the CAN contract but who do not use ASL are typically not being provided SSP services at this time.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked if there is advertisement that can be sent out to centers for independent living (CILs) in the area to spread the word of the need for SSPs. Ms. Santos responded that she will look into this idea. Ms. Santos noted that she is unclear how contracts can be utilized to issue payment for services if outside, non-contracted, SSP assistance is found. She and Mr. Lassen will follow up on this with ADS fiscal services.**

**Report on BESB/BRS meeting about DeafBlind classification**

**Mr. Lassen reported that BESB continues to meet on an ongoing basis with BRS. Work is being done to develop a protocol to enable BESB and BRS to assist one another to meet client needs.**

**At BESB, in the Adult Services program, there is a group of clients with worsening prognoses who are classified as Visually Impaired Progressive (VIP). Because they are not legally blind, this population is not eligible to receive or be issued a Certificate of Legal Blindness, although they can be assisted with independent living needs by AS or in their search for competitive employment by VR. Work is ongoing to build a greater understanding of the two designations (LB, for those with legal blindness, and VIP) among all those who are working to serve clients with deafblindness.**

**Meeting Dates for 2023 (Proposed 1/24, 4/25, 7/25, 10/24)**

**Mr. Lassen proposed the following meeting dates for 2023: January 24, April 25, July 25, and October 24.**

**MOTION: A motion was made by Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn, seconded by Mr. Seidel, to approve the proposed 2023 meeting dates of January 24, April 25, July 25, and October 24. Motion passed unanimously.**

**BESB Program Updates**

**Interim Director Cepelak reported that BESB has hired a new director who will be starting on November 18, 2022. The incoming director’s name is Carol Jenkins. Previously, incoming Director Jenkins served as an Assistant Director for Customer Service for the state of Nebraska. Interim Director Cepelak stated that it is likely that Incoming Director Jenkins will be able to attend the next meeting of this committee.**

**Ms. Flaherty asked about the incoming director’s experience working with the DeafBlind community. Interim Director Cepelak could not answer that question specifically, but Mr. Norton reported that Ms. Jenkins does have significant background in working with those with deafblindness.**

**Mr. Lassen reported that BESB’s programs are working together to support clients who are transitioning from Children’s Services to Adult Services. Typically, clients who are transitioning into AS receive VR services as well.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler opened the meeting for questions, comments, and concerns.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn shared her concern that many people who work with individuals who are blind or visually impaired are not familiar with DeafBlind culture. There seems to be a lack of information about DeafBlind culture. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn feels that there should be training provided to educate people about it, and noted that she is unsure where funding could be found to educate the public about DeafBlind culture. She wondereded if this group or BESB can participate in training related to DeafBlind culture.**

**Chairperson Tyler questioned if there is a section of the BESB website where information related to DeafBlindness can be shared. Chairperson Tyler thinks that such sharing of information online can be beneficial.**

**Mr. Chege encouraged Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn to contact him so that there could be further conversation regarding the type of outreach she proposes.**

**Mr. Lassen noted that Ms. Aparo and Ms. Santos are now engaged in outreach to educate persons with deafblindness regarding what kinds of issues should be brought to BESB for resolution and what issues should be brought to Access Through Technology (ATT) for resolution.**

**Ms. Santos elaborated stating that, in her experience, some clients thought that they were supposed to go through their BESB social worker to engage with Access Through Technology, and she noted that this is not the case.**

**Ms. Santos stated that the joint BESB/ATT outreach is conducted (and presentations made) as program overviews, not on an individual basis.**

**Chairperson Tyler asked Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn about the camp emphasizing tactile communication in August. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn reported that the camp was a success.**

**Mr. Stanley shared that the American School for the Deaf was very happy to host the event at their Camp Isola Bella. Although the group was small, the program went well. Five campers attended, four from different parts of the United States and one from abroad. Mr. Stanley noted it was an amazing experience and that 75 people came to visit the camp on visitor’s day.**

**Chairperson Tyler asked how the Walk and Roll event held in New Britain recently went. Mr. Lassen reported that BESB Adult Services, Access Through Technology, and BRS all attended and participated in community outreach.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn shared her disappointment that there were no residents from Connecticut at the camp held at Isola Bella. She believes that is a concern to be addressed moving forward in order to provide equal access to all.**

**Ms. Santos noted that clients who attended the camp at Harkness from Oak Hill were served by monies provided by this committee. The contract with Oak Hill stipulates that monies are available for community involvement events including summer camp specifically. CAN does not have a contract for camp expenditures as Oak Hill does.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn questioned who could help (and how), perhaps through legislative action, to make these opportunities available for DBAC clients outside of Oak Hill.**

**Mr. Lassen responded that these needs could likely be met through a new contract between the state and CAN.**

**Ms. Arseneau reported that the camp at Harkness reopened for the first time in several years, with the closure due to the pandemic. Clients were able to participate in a myriad of activities. Ms. Arseneau reported that finding Oak Hill staff to help hold the camp proved to be difficult. Ms. Arseneau reported that the camp went well and that clients enjoyed their time. There are plans to hold the camp again next year.**

**Announcements**

**Mr. Chege asked the committee members if they are aware of clients experiencing cancellations and postponements of medical and other priority appointments due to interpreter unavailability. He explained that he is hoping to find a way that these occurrences can be avoided.**

**Ms. Santos noted that she is experiencing a lack of interpreters that results in cancellations and postponements. Finding interpreters is currently difficult and Ms. Santos does not know how to solve the problem.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn expressed that this is a critical issue and feels that interpreters do not have enough experience working with individuals who are DeafBlind, especially related to tactile interpreting.**

**Ms. Byrnes shared that she feels interpreters should be encouraged to participate in tactile interpreting because alternative modes of communication are not viable for some people. Something needs to be done to encourage interpreters to participate.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn expressed her agreement and stressed the importance of educating people about the DeafBlind community.**

**Mr. Stanley stated that he agrees with the sentiments expressed. Mr. Stanley stressed that strategies to correct this problem must be found, and noted that interpreters may be hesitant to participate in tactile interpretation because of the pandemic.**

**Ms. Arseneau stated that she shares this concern and that efforts to train staff in tactile sign language are being made at Oak Hill.**

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:41 a.m. and Ms. Arseneau seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE: January 24, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom**

**Appendix A:**

**ACCESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY 4TH YEAR- PERMANENT PROGRAM**

**QUARTER 1**

**JULY 1, 2022 – SEPT 30, 2022**

**We have been allocated $123,080 for the 2022-2023 year.**

**Services this quarter July 1, 2022 to Sept 30, 2022 were provided to 3 consumers.**

**3 devices, 2 accessories, 0 software, and 0 upgraded devices were purchased.**

**Quarter 4 YTD**

**$491.00 Assessments $491.00**

**$7020.00 Equipment/upgrades/inventory $7020.00**

**$7,058.00 Installation/Training $7058.00**

**$4558.00 Administration cost $4558.00**

**$1236.00 Outreach $1236.00**

**Total spent in for the 1st Quarter was $20,363.00.**

**We spent Quarter 1 on training two individuals on the assistive technology devices they received from our program. I am presently processing 4 applications from individuals not previously associated with this program to verify eligibility of services.**

**On July 18th I attended a conference in Mystic, CT and on October 14th the Disability Employment Awareness Resource Fair in New Britain to promote the program.**

**ACCESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY 4TH YEAR- PERMANENT PROGRAM**

**I am working with the DB community to reschedule a presentation on the Access Through Technology program. October 27th has been scheduled for this presentation. Unfortunately, this has been postponed twice for interpreter availability and COVID related circumstances. We are hopeful to report next quarter that these sessions have taken place.**