**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)**
 **Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)**
 **DeafBlind Advisory Committee (DBAC) Meeting**
 **[ in-person and on Zoom]**
 **Meeting Minutes**
 **March 12th, 2024**

**Review of Meeting Protocol**
**Ms. Pam Crawford, Ms. Rayah Martin, and Ms. Carol Jenkins reviewed the protocol for participating in the DeafBlind Advisory Committee Meeting.**

**Voting Members Present- in attendance**
**Chairwoman Hana Tyler, Client; Mr. Wayne Seidel, Department of Developmental Services (DDS); Mr. Jesse Stanley, American School for the Deaf (ASD); Ms. Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, DeafBlind Support and Access Network (DBSAN); Ms. Barbara Cloonan, Parent; Ms. Karen Olson, New England Consortium on DeafBlindness (NEC); Ms. Kathy Morgan, Guardian; Ms. Christine Telford, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC); Ms. Cheri Byrnes, DeafBlind Association of Connecticut; Ms. Sandra Miles, Department of Developmental Services (DDS) - Southbury Training School (STS); Ms. Nicole Feeney, Oak Hill**

**Non-Voting Members Present**
**Ms. Carol Jenkins, ADS-BESB Director; Mr. Christopher Lassen, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Ms. Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Ms. Krystal Kelly, ADS-BESB Vocational Rehabilitation; Mr. Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS**

**Others Present**
**Ms. Mikaela Zito, Usher Syndrome Coalition; Mr. Alan Gunzburg, Consumer; Ms. Rayah Martin, ADS-BESB; Ms. Lisa Drew ADS-BESB; Mr. Bruce Stovall, Oak Hill; Ms. Rebecca Scorso, Oak Hill; Ms. Abigail McNeal, Oak Hill; Ms. Sue Shatney, ADS/BRS; Ms. Pam Crawford, Interpreter**

**Introductions**
**Chairwoman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and asked that a roll call be taken. Mr. Christopher Lassen conducted the roll call. The attendance is recorded above.**

**Old Business**

**Ms. Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn raised concerns about the absence of certain information from the minutes. Specifically, she noted that there was no mention of the discussion about information sharing with Ed Pelletier and committee members. She believed that the committee talked about the CAN mentoring program, shared some concepts, and then voted on it, but there was no representation of this business in the minutes.**

**In response, Mr. Christopher Lassen clarified that the third page of the minutes did, in fact, reference the CAN mentoring program. The motion was made by Mr. Wayne Seidel, authorizing CAN to proceed with their proposal for a peer mentoring program within their current budget allocation and without impeding existing client services. Ms. Karen Olson seconded this motion, and it was put to a roll call vote, which passed 9-0, with no abstentions. The motion was approved.**

**Mr. Christopher Lassen addressed Ms. Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn's concerns and stated that the minutes accurately reflected the motion made and approved, even if they did not capture every aspect of the discussion. He suggested that if there were any concerns, CAN could be asked to report back. He also mentioned that the committee could not implement CAN's program but could ask them to send a representative to report back on their progress.**

**Mr. Christopher Lassen mentioned that if a committee member wanted to propose a change to the minutes regarding the DeafBlind technology program update, they could make an amendment. For instance, they could add a prior quarter before the first number and(year-to-date) YTD for the year-to-date before the second number. This would provide clarity and could be voted on. If the amendment were approved, the revised minutes would reflect the changes.**

**Ms. Carol Jenkins suggested having Mr. Jesse Stanley's name corrected on the last page of the minutes.**

**The committee members decided to amend the minutes for the update on the DeafBlind Technology Program budget to note that the first number on each line represents expenditures in the previous quarter, and the second number on each line represents year-to-date expenditures; also, to correct the spelling of Mr. Jesse Stanley’s first name on the last page of the minutes.**

**Approval of Minutes from December 12th, 2023,**

**MOTION: Ms. Karen Olson moved to accept the minutes, and Ms. Sandra Miles seconded the motion. Following discussion, a motion was made to amend the minutes, as follows:**

**MOTION: To amend the minutes for the update on the DeafBlind Technology Program budget to note that the first number on each line represents expenditures in the previous quarter, and the second number on each line represents year-to-date expenditures; also, to correct the spelling of Mr. Jesse Stanley’s first name on the last page of the minutes. Motion was made by Ms. Karen Olson, seconded by Chairwoman Tyler.**

**A roll call vote was taken, with ten members voting in favor with Ms. Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn abstaining. The motion passed, ten to zero. On a voice vote, the committee voted to accept the minutes.**

**Update on the DeafBlind Technology Program**

**Tabled**

**New Business**

**Expenditures through January 31, 2024**

**[[1]](#endnote-1)Appendix**

**Mr. Christopher Lassen reported during a discussion of expenditures, that he was recently contacted by DDS representatives who noted that services for clients with Deaf Blindness at Southbury Training School have continued to be provided. They would like to bring to attention that the surplus funds from the DeafBlind Advisory Committee provided by BESB have been depleted, and they would be interested in receiving reimbursement once again from the DeafBlind Advisory Committee for the services they have continued to provide going forward in the coming fiscal year.**

**Mr. Christopher Lassen asked Ms. Sandra Miles to elaborate on** **what it is that she has been doing with the clients at Southbury Training School.**

**Ms. Sandra Miles responded that there are four people involved, and they have people who take them out maybe twice a week. They go to many different places, always different. They do a lot of sensory stuff and communication and socialization with other people in the community and, you know, with each other. The staff that she has are excellent. They have people who are more than willing to come on board. They would like to include two more people who have become Deaf and blind over the years because of age.**

**Ms. Karen Olson asked Ms. Sandra Miles if she had a proposal of what you would be seeking in terms of money and finances.**

**Ms. Sandra Miles expressed her surprise at this being her first time hearing about it. She thought they still had funds that were already accrued at the training school, so she did not know about this. She only knows how much they are paid, and it would be great if they could receive the services at least once a week. Additionally, it would be great if two more people could be added to the group, as they currently have four members.**

**Mr. Wayne Seidel, the representative from DDS, expressed his confidence in providing more information on the subject matter at the next scheduled meeting. Mr. Wayne Seidel clarified that the individuals at Southbury have been receiving the required services, but the matter at hand is the funding of these services. He emphasized the importance of ensuring adequate funding for these services, especially with the anticipated expansion of the number of individuals at Southbury Training School (STS) receiving these supports. Mr. Wayne Seidel also mentioned that he would be providing a more detailed outline of the matter during the upcoming meeting.**

**Ms. Kathy Morgan stated to Ms. Sandra Miles that she knows that some of the residents at Southbury have been on the original listing for this grant. However, thinking of the Southbury clients, she thinks it would also be appropriate for the BESB to look into the full roster of clients that have been identified, not only at Southbury Training School but also at the American School for the Deaf. Perhaps there are some clients that could utilize more services, and perhaps there are some clients, like the folks at Oak Hill, who are aging and may no longer be eligible to use the funding. She requested that a review of the clients who are receiving the funding through agencies be updated.**

**Ms. Karen Olson added that she believes they have a minimum of two and possibly three students who will be graduating this year. Therefore, it is crucial that they contact Ms. Mary Johns, who works in Children's Services, for a full list. Although not entirely certain, Ms. Karen Olson knows of three individuals who are graduating. It is unclear what their plans are, but it is likely that they will remain local.**

**The committee discussed if there should be a motion to request that Mr. Wayne Seidel provide an updated list of DDS/STS clients eligible to receive community inclusion services at Southbury Training School and to request similar lists from the American School for the Deaf, Oak Hill School, and CAN. The committee reached an agreement regarding the motion.**

**MOTION: Ms. Kathy Morgan moved to request that Mr. Wayne Seidel provide an updated list of DDS/STS clients eligible to receive community inclusion services at Southbury Training School and to request similar lists from the American School for the Deaf, Oak Hill School, and CAN, with Chairwoman Tyler seconding the motion. On a roll call vote, the amendment passed unanimously with no abstentions.**

**Report from CAN on SSP recruitment**

**Tabled**

**Update on the development of the contract with HKNC**

**Ms. Christine Telford from the Helen Keller National Center and Ms. Carol Jenkins reported on the development of the contract with HKNC. She provided the required information to Ms. Carol Jenkins, Director at BESB, who subsequently forwarded it to the fiscal department. The BESB fiscal department has since sent the information to the State Office of Policy and Management (OPM) for approval. At present, they are waiting for OPM's approval, and it has been advised that it could take between four and six months to receive an update.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairwoman Tyler shared her request for street signs from the town to make her daily walks with her dog safer. Specifically, she requested signs that read "Deaf and blind person walking" or something similar to alert drivers and passersby. These signs were placed 20 feet away from her driveway and another 40 feet away from the opposite direction. She believes that requesting such signs can be helpful for anyone living in the area to alert others that there is a DeafBlind person living in the neighborhood. She emphasized the need to have the signs installed securely to prevent theft and She encouraged others to take advantage of this option by requesting these signs from the town, as it has been helpful for her. Overall, Chairwoman Tyler believed that sharing this information could empower our committee members to take similar measures to ensure their safety and security while navigating their surroundings.**

**Chairwoman Tyler also shared she knows of a company called Reizen. They make a wide range of practical products for people with disabilities or those who are Deaf or blind. One of their products is a clock that she received as a gift and has found to be wonderful. With a simple press of the button on top, it speaks to you, telling you the time, day, and month. It is a practical and accessible product available for anyone who needs it.**

**Announcements**

**Mr. Jesse Stanley commented on the quality of products from Reizen, mentioned by Chairwoman Tyler which he found to be wonderful. He also asked if the audio product mentioned by Chairwoman Tyler was useful for Deaf people. He added that the American School for the Deaf is currently seeking a grant to provide more community access for DeafBlind individuals. The goal is to offer workshops open to the public to learn more about DeafBlind culture, interpreter training, and SP training for CAN.**

**Mr. Jesse Stanley also shared that they had arranged an interpreter training in October, which will be conducted over a span of two days. He has observed that there are a lot of mobile applications available for visually impaired people in their area. These applications can help users understand where to place their phones and have text-based features. He is wondering if these applications can indicate directions or routes to the users. Additionally, he stated that he has noticed that there are applications available with voice assistants, and he is curious if they should advocate for more accessibility features in these applications for the DeafBlind community. He is also wondering if this would be appropriate for us to pursue.**

**Mr. Jesse Stanley extended an invitation to everyone for the DeafBlind retreat. All visitors are welcome to attend. The retreat will be held on Thursday, July 11th, 2024. He is inviting everyone to come to see and experience how they run the DeafBlind retreat, which is great and open to everyone invited. In addition, he highlighted that this year, starting in the spring, they will be working on establishing a revised biking program, going to different parks and different places, and trying to bike our way through these different areas in parks. He has yet to set this date up, but he will be doing that as soon as possible and let you all know when that will be happening.**

**Ms. Marjorie Santos provided a comment that the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) is committed to serving all individuals along the Deaf-Blind spectrum. She explicated that those with Usher's type one or type two may have numerous disabilities. Ms. Marjorie Santos stated that many of her clients are classified as Deaf-Blind and do not use sign language as a mode of communication. Instead, some of these Consumers rely solely on braille to communicate. It is imperative to note that BESB serves all individuals along the Deaf-Blind spectrum, regardless of whether they use sign language or not. Ms. Marjorie Santos expressed her gratitude to Chairwoman Tyler for the information and emphasized that the service is available to all.**

**Ms. Cheri Byrnes added an announcement. The DeafBlind agency in Connecticut will be hosting a workshop next spring between the Agency for the Deaf and The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). When she has more detailed information, she will let you know as well. She will share that information about that training workshop with everyone.**

**Ms. Kathy Morgan expressed her positive view on hosting workshops in collaboration with the agencies. She recommended that the organizers reach out to vendors, The Marketplace at Oak Hill or BESB, who have access to some of the essential equipment and assistive technology required for the workshops. These vendors could provide the presenters with the necessary resources to demonstrate and explain the tools and technology during the workshops.**

**Ms. Christine Telford, a representative from the Helen Keller National Center, commented on Mr. Jesse Stanley's announcement about accessible applications. She mentioned that the center has a Technology Research Innovation Center, also known as TRIC, which focuses on application development. Ms. Christine Telford offered to partner with Mr. Jesse Stanley and connect him with their application developers. He can then provide feedback to improve the accessibility of the applications. She suggested that they can leverage their existing relationship in this regard.**

**Ms. Christine Telford advised the committee Technology Research Innovation Center (TRIC) is a center for innovation and research, and it is open to anyone who wants to contact them. If someone needs specialized training on a specific application or technology, such as the Focus Forty Braille Display, they will need to apply to come to our campus for in-person training. Other than that, they are an information research center where they share information with others. The person in charge of the research center is Mr. Scott Davert, and if you need to contact him, Ms. Christine Telford can connect you with him so he can share his network.**

**Chairwoman Tyler expressed her amazement at the number of new items that were discussed. She particularly appreciated Mr. Jesse Stanley's announcement about the biking and the retreat, as well as the various applications that were mentioned. Notably, she mentioned "Seeing AI," which she finds helpful in situations where she needs assistance and her husband is unavailable. This application allows users to take a video of an object and receive assistance from volunteers who can identify the object's characteristics, such as color. This has been beneficial for her, as she lives with Usher Syndrome.**

**Chairwoman Tyler also wanted to bring attention to the Reizen clock, which features large numbers that are visible to individuals who may have difficulty hearing but can see the numbers on the clock. She noted that many other useful products are available on the website and suggested that a system would be helpful in alerting consumers of new applications that may be beneficial to them.**

**Chairwoman Tyler added she proposed a technology program to provide in-home demonstrations and explanations of new technology products. She believes that this would be an effective way to help consumers become more aware of the resources available to them, particularly when it comes to technology.**

**There were discussions on the Topic of Usher Syndrome.**

**Ms. Lisa Flaherty-Vaughan inquired about Chairwoman Tyler and sought clarification on her hearing condition, specifically whether she had Usher Syndrome and whether she identified as a Deaf individual. As Usher Syndrome is not necessarily linked with deafness, Ms. Flaherty-Vaughan was curious to know how Chairwoman Tyler identified in this regard.**

**Mr. Jesse Stanley has provided a clarification to the discussion that may shed light on the matter. Usher Syndrome is frequently associated with Retinitis Pigmentosa, which can lead to hearing loss and ultimately result in Usher Syndrome. There exist different categories and groups of people, and in some instances, individuals are born deaf, while in other situations, they experience hearing loss at an early age. Additionally, some individuals may become deafened later in life, with sudden onset occurring sometimes during young adulthood.**

 **Adjournment**
**Ms. Sandra Miles moved to adjourn the meeting with Ms. Karen Olson seconding the motion, which passed unanimously by voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 AM.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE: June 11th,2024 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.**

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| **DEAFBLIND GRANT****Financial Report****Grant Period** | 7/1/2023 - 06/30/2024 |
| **Grant Total** | $264,045.00 |
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| **Financial Summary Period** |  |
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| **Vendor Name** | **Amount Paid YTD** |
| American School for the Deaf | $2,360.00 |
| Communication Advocacy Network | $55,917.01 |
| Cosign CT LLC | $2,020.00 |
| NWI Global | $0.00 |
| CT Institute for the Blind | $1,031.00 |
| United Cerebral Palsy Association | $4,927.35 |
| New England Low Vision | $0.00 |
| NWI Global | $1,010.10 |
| Elizabeth Hilton, Inc | $328.50 |
| Stephanie Sessions | $0.00 |
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| **Total Expenses** | $67,593.96 |
|  |  |
| **Remaining Grant Balance** | $196,451.04 |

 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)