**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**

**Jul 26, 2022**

**Review of Meeting Protocol**

**The protocol for participation in the DeafBlind Advisory Committee Meeting was reviewed by interpreting staff.**

**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; Tara Brown-Ogilvie, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC); Barbara Cloonan, Parent; Karen Olson, New England Consortium on DeafBlindness (NEC); Erich Krengel, Capitol Region Mental Health Center (DMHAS); Lisa Flaherty-Vaughn, DeafBlind Support and Access Network (DBSAN); Kathy Morgan, Guardian; Cheri Byrnes, DeafBlind Association of Connecticut**

**Non-Voting Members Present**

**Cheryl Cepelak, ADS-BESB Director (interim); Christopher Lassen, ADS-BESB Adult Services; Marjorie Santos, ADS-BESB Adult Services**

**Voting Members Absent**

**Elise Arseneau, Oak Hill; Al Sylvestre, Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired**

**Non-Voting Members Absent**

**Heidi Henaire, ADS-Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)**

**Others Present**

**Alvin Chege, ADS-BRS; Andrew Norton, ADS Legislative Liaison; Sue Pederson, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN); Zachary Moore, ADS-BESB; Patricia Clark, ADS-BESB Interpreter Coordinator; Muriel Aparo, ADS-BRS; Cheri Hembree, Communication Advocacy Network (CAN)**

**Introductions**

**Chairwoman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. and asked that a roll call be taken. Mr. Moore conducted the roll call.**

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

**MOTION: Ms. Cloonan made a motion to adopt the April 26, 2022, minutes, seconded by Ms. Brown-Ogilvie. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Old Business**

**Update on DeafBlind Technology Program**

**Ms. Aparo stated the period this report covers is April 1, 2022, through June 30, 2022.**

**Ms. Aparo reported that all money under the purview of this committee was spent except $13,000 which was allocated back to the National DeafBlind Equipment Distribution Program.**

**Ms. Aparo reviewed the line items of the attached report found in Appendix A.**

**Ms. Aparo will be attending the Walk & Roll Event tomorrow in New Britain, Connecticut to promote the Access Through Technology program.**

**Ms. Aparo has spoken about services available to persons with deafblindess at two senior centers, with Ms. Santos also attending one of these events.**

**Ms. Aparo and Ms. Santos are working together to present similar programs at additional senior centers and to other agencies. They will be meeting with Ms. Byrnes and Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn to brief them on their presentation which will explain the services that BESB provides versus the services that the Access Through Technology program provides to Connecticut residents with deafblindness.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked for clarification about whether Ms. Aparo and Ms. Santos are referring to presenting information to individuals who are deafblind or to individuals who are “hearingblind,” a term Ms. Flaherty Vaughn used to describe persons whose blindness preceded their hearing loss.**

**Ms. Aparo clarified that the referrals she receives come from many sources including community outreach, BESB, and doctors. They can come by word of mouth or they may come from other agencies.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn believes that there is a lack of communication between agencies regarding the deafblind community. There are many individuals who are deafblind and who are confused about who to reach out to for assistance.**

**Ms. Morgan commented she feels it is important to understand and clarify that individuals must be referred to BESB by eye doctors and be registered with the agency before receiving most services related to deafblindness.**

**Ms. Aparo stated she is unsure if Ms. Morgan’s comments is accurate as her program has served some people who are not on the BESB registry.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn noted that it seems like there is confusion regarding the “hearingblind,” the deafblind and the merging of both. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn feels it is important to treat these groups as separate entities and that this will increase the quality of the services provided. She believes that these groups should receive services separately.**

**Mr. Lassen noted that this committee has existed for approximately fifty years and that deafblindness, the historic term with which the program was established, continues to be used to refer to the entire population being served.**

**Mr. Lassen clarified that the charge of the DeafBlind Advisory Committee, which is a part of and is supported by BESB, is to serve all clients who have legal blindness and hearing loss that interferes with their ability communicate effectively. There can only be one group meeting quarterly to represent the needs of all the BESB clients who fall under the general heading of deafblindness.**

**Mr. Lassen further clarified that an effort to identify and specify the communication methods used by clients is underway to ensure improved services. This committee needs to focus on all the needs of all clients with deafblindness. The population of clients who are on the BESB registry has changed since the inception of this project in the late 1960s. Mr. Lassen provided further explanation of the history and development of the DeafBlind Advisory Committee.**

**Mr. Lassen commented that the Adult Services program is working with the Children’s Services program at BESB to identify each client who transitions from Children’s to Adult Services who might qualify for deafblind services.**

**Ms. Brown-Ogilvie thanked Ms. Aparo for sharing the fiscal report in advance of this meeting.**

**Ms. Brown-Ogilvie asked if the meetings held by Ms. Aparo and Ms. Santos would be recorded to benefit staff who make referrals related to deafblindness.**

**Ms. Aparo responded that presentations can be presented to groups on request and that recording the meetings to share information is a good idea that should be discussed. Ms. Aparo encouraged the committee to reach out with referrals and requests for information.**

**Ms. Morgan commented that Mr. Lassen’s explanation of the role of this committee was informative.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn stated she feels that there is a greater need for funding for people who are deafblind versus those who are “hearingblind” because there is more of a need related to communication due to the diversity of this group. Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn feels funding should be expanded to meet these communication needs.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn suggested having available a site outside of the home where communication can occur to meet client needs, instead of clients needing to invite people into their homes.**

**Chairperson Tyler asked Mr. Lassen if modifications can be made to update how this committee functions based on the developments that have occurred over time since the committee’s inception.**

**Mr. Lassen responded that he and Mr. Norton have been discussing establishing bylaws for the committee and are reviewing the enabling legislation related to this committee.**

**If committee members are interested in participating in discussion about how the committee has historically functioned and allocated funding, Mr. Lassen would like to involve them in the conversation by taking their names today.**

**Interim Director Cepelak encouraged committee members to share suggestions with BESB leadership related to making changes to this committee and reviewing whether additional groups are warranted. Specific suggestions and the establishment of workgroups were encouraged.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn stated she believes it is important for people who are familiar with the culture of this population to be working with this group. A range of perspectives should be involved and would be valuable in establishing bylaws.**

**Ms. Santos clarified her role at BESB as a social worker. She provides case management services for many clients who are legally blind and to most of those who are deafblind, in order to help them meet their independent living needs. Ms. Santos noted that deafblindness occurs on a spectrum. Ms. Santos reported that her responsibility as a social worker is to meet individuals where they are at; for example, if they use sign language then that is what will be used during their interactions.**

**Ms. Santos noted that having two groups will limit people; it also may cause unwanted separation between the groups who enjoy an established cultural interconnectedness.**

**Ms. Brown-Ogilvie elaborated on Ms. Santos’ comments and noted her agreement that deafblindness occurs on a spectrum. Ms. Brown-Ogilvie expressed that one possible solution outside of separation would be to do more training and to hold more events to understand and embrace the culture of deafblindness.**

**New Business**

**Expenditures Through Fiscal Year End 2022**

**The report provided spans the fiscal year through June 30, 2022.**

**Mr. Lassen reported that total expenditures were $133,333.58. Expenditures were higher than recent years.**

**Non-Employee Reimbursements totaled $585.88; Translation and Interpretation Services totaled $12,342.55; Transportation of Persons totaled $983.29; General Client Services totaled $111,280.25; Fees and Expenditures for the Education of Blind Persons totaled $5,716.61; Vocational Training for Blind Persons totaled $2,425.00.**

**Ms. Morgan asked for the total amount of expenditures that were paid to Oak Hill. Mr. Lassen stated that, while he did not have specific numbers for specific vendors, he did know that Oak Hill had not submitted any invoices during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2022.**

**Ms. Santos noted that five individuals received services from individual vendors in the last year. One of these individuals passed away; four were served. $15,180.30 was expended for these clients.**

**Ms. Morgan stated that individuals in group homes have been isolated due to the pandemic.**

**Ms. Cloonan noted that she agrees with the statement made by Ms. Morgan and feels that the issue is related to staffing deficiencies.**

**Ms. Cloonan shared that, regarding the summer camp for Oak Hill at Harkness, day trips are occurring.**

**Ms. Cloonan stated she spoke with Oak Hill and encouraged their attendance at meetings of this committee.**

**Mr. Seidel reported a staffing crisis for contracted service providers. This has been mostly observed in relation to individuals who need individual services. Some improvements have been made and Mr. Seidel expressed his hope that improvement will continue.**

**Mr. Seidel stated that merely because grant funds are not being expended does not mean that individuals are not getting opportunities to go out into the community; very likely, alternative funding is being utilized. Mr. Seidel will seek further information related to funding.**

**Mr. Lassen suggested that he and Ms. Santos reach out to enlist committee members to assist with reviewing the creation of bylaws and also to review necessary changes in allocating funds this fiscal year.**

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

**Mr. Lassen stated that a number of Adult Services staff met last month with Ms. Clark, Mr. Chege, Ms. Shatney, and Ms. Henaire to work to expand collaboration between BESB and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).**

**Currently, a great deal of time is being taken to explain the role of services to clients related to BRS and BESB. A follow-up meeting to discuss the responsibilities of BRS staff is being planned. The improvement of documentation related to communication modalities will be discussed as well.**

**Mr. Lassen stated that collaboration between BRS and BESB to meet client needs is proving to be successful.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked if it possible to invite consumers who are deafblind to join this committee as guests to gain different perspectives.**

**Mr. Lassen stated he will work with Ms. Santos to explore this idea.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn suggested that two of each of the quarterly meetings be focused on financial discussion.**

**Ms. Morgan expressed concern with this proposed separation. Ms. Morgan would not like to separate communication and noted this committee only meets four times a year.**

**Mr. Stanley seconded Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn’s suggestion because he would like to see more time spent on ways the deafblind community can benefit from this committee. For example, more discussion on camps available to clients.**

**Ms. Santos related that her understanding of the purpose of this committee is to review how monies are being spent and what services can be provided to clients to promote independent living.**

**Ms. Santos stated that agendas should be followed to ensure that all topics can be discussed to allow for additional topics.**

**Ms. Morgan suggested that an agenda item be added to reflect time to be spent on topics such as camps as Mr. Stanley suggested.**

**Mr. Lassen stated that a routine report regarding additional topics can be added to the agenda moving forward.**

**Mr. Stanley suggested allotting specific amounts of time to agenda items to keep meetings on track.**

**Mr. Stanley also expressed his agreement that financial affairs are important. Mr. Stanley noted that finances related to camps are a topic that should be covered.**

**Ms. Santos stated that she had consulted with ADS Business Office staff and found that grant money cannot be used for camps. Ms. Santos was aware of a request for scholarships to attend a camp and was advised that the monies allotted could not be used in a scholarship capacity.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn asked about the use of awards and scholarships for individuals who are deafblind who go to camp for education. Ms. Santos stated that awards and scholarships are not provided. Individual authorizations for services can be created for opportunities such as camps with specific approvals, but this is a different process.**

**Meeting Date for 2022 (10/25/22)**

**Ms. Tyler reviewed the upcoming meeting date.**

**BESB Program Updates**

**Mr. Lassen reported that there are no Children’s Services or Vocational Rehabilitation representatives present to make a report.**

**Report from the Chair**

**Chairperson Tyler reported that Sandy Miles, who was unable to speak at this meeting but is in attendance on Zoom, stated that BESB participants are being provided opportunities to go out into the community; she reported this via text message to Chairperson Tyler.**

**Chairperson Tyler noted several kinds of technology she has recently learned about. Chairperson Tyler commented that she uses an iPad to dictate text and shares it with individuals who utilize sign language to communicate. Chairperson Tyler has also learned about a talking hearing aid that not only amplifies sound but can translate conversations into an individual’s primary language among other features. Chairperson Tyler also made the committee aware that there are glasses that change speech into subtitles on the lenses. Chairperson Tyler shared that there is an app that will isolate a person speaking in a crowded room. If anyone is interested in more information about these items, they can reach out to Chairperson Tyler.**

**Ms. Santos requested that Chairperson Tyler share with her what she has learned about these technologies.**

**Announcements**

**Ms. Brown-Ogilvie asked about the status of the BESB Director position.**

**Mr. Lassen reported that Mr. Norton and Interim Director Cepelak have retired but are on an extended work period to support agency needs. Additionally, the job posting for BESB Director has been posted to the state website for applicants.**

**Mr. Lassen asked that members of this committee share the posting which will be shared with the committee.**

**Ms. Cloonan asked if Mr. Norton’s position, Legislative Liaison, will be filled. Mr. Lassen indicated that it will be filled but will take time.**

**Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn announced that the DeafBlind Support and Access Network (DBSAN) is holding a retreat on August 18, 2022, and invited the members of this committee to attend. The deadline for registration is August 6, 2022.**

**Ms. Hembree shared that the DeafBlind Association of Connecticut (DBAC) will be holding a banquet in Windsor Locks, Connecticut for their 35th anniversary on August 20, 2022.**

**Ms. Brown-Ogilvie noted that Mr. Norton was now able to speak at the meeting as previously he was only able to listen. Mr. Norton was thanked for his work with ADS.**

**Mr. Norton shared with the committee that the hiring process for the BESB Administrative Assistant position is almost complete and someone should be starting in that role soon.**

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: Ms. Flaherty-Vaughn moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:03 p.m. and Mr. Seidel seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

**NEXT MEETING DATE: October 25, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom**

**Addendum A:**

**ACCESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY**

**4TH YEAR- PERMANENT PROGRAM**

**QUARTER 4**

**APR 1, 2022 – JUN 30, 2022**

**We have been allocated $117,156 for the 2021-2022 year.**

**Services this quarter APR 1, 2022, to JUN 30, 2022, were provided to 4 consumers**

**6 accessory items, 1 replacement device were delivered to the consumers.**

**Quarter 4**

**$1052.26 Assessments**

**$477.72 Equipment/upgrades/inventory**

**$8594.06 Installation/Training**

**$4244.78 Administration cost**

**Total spent in for Quarter 3 was $16,376.59**

**We had a total of 10 applicants that are received services for the 2021-2022 Fiscal year. Presently 3 are still receiving services of that 10. We have two new applications in review. We were able to spend all the grant except for $13,000.00 which was reallocated back to the NDBEDP. This is a big difference from years past where we reallocated $70,000 in 2019-2020 and $46,800 in 2020-2021.**

**The new 2022-2023 year will give us $123,080 for a grant amount.**

**I (Muriel Aparo) will be attending the Walk & Roll Event in New Britain to promote our program which takes place at Walnut Hill Park on July 20th from 5:00 – 7:00 pm.**

**Outreach – May library conference. July – sponsorship for Walk & Roll**