

**CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR BVRS AND
BBVS HARRISBURG DISTRICT
Wednesday, September 13, 2017**

We met in the conference room of BVRS and BBVS on the eighth floor at 555 Walnut Street, Harrisburg. The following individuals were present:

Frank Abror
Pat Kane
Ron Davis
Kay Macsi
Chris Ament
Elaine Welch
Ed Martin
John Horst
Fred Bell
Cathy Long
Stephanie Varner
Nicole Wade.

Minutes for the June 14, 2017 were approved on a motion from John Horst, seconded by Elaine Welch. The motion carried unanimously. Stephanie mentioned that CAC will be holding elections in December, 2017 for officers. Terms begin in March, 2018. Stephanie Varner, Chair, is not eligible to continue in this role. John Horst, Vice-Chair, is not interested in the position. Cathy Long, recording Secretary, is willing to continue. Cathy has been taking minutes for the CAC since at least December, 2014. Not sure when she was officially nominated as Recording Secretary, but she is willing to continue. John stated with

regard to meetings, he questions the interest of BVRS and BBVS, since no one attended the June, 2017 meeting due to mandatory training they were having. He believes because of the mandatory training and agency staff's inability to attend because of that, this CAC meeting should have been rescheduled at another date. We need to take the CAC seriously. Stephanie stated she did not know about the scheduled mandatory training until the afternoon prior to the June meeting. Actually, we did not know we had the power to cancel a CAC meeting, believing that only the agencies hosting it could do so. Stephanie said she did believe someone from BVRS or BBVS would be there. However, that was not true.

BVRS Report: Pat Kane. First of all, Pat apologized that no one could attend the CAC meeting in June. He said they did not have much advance notice and the training was mandatory. When the Executive Director says "go to training!" that is what has to happen. Over the past few months BVRS has had some staff changes. Two counselors have been promoted to Central Office positions now working with transition services for young people. One counselor retired. Five positions are posted. Hoping to interview this fall and bring on new people by 2018. Four VR counselor positions are open and one Rehab counselor for the deaf within the Harrisburg BVRS coverage area. Two new counselors are working as VR counselors, having started with BVRS as interns. These counselors are transition counselors in the West Shore and in the Lebanon areas. BVRS also has hired a new Early Outreach Coordinator to cover territory in Harrisburg.

BVRS had their second Early Reach Academy at Penn State, Middletown campus. 23 students took part and took one three-credit course, Communications 101. Proudly, all who took the course did pass it, so they now have three credits of college from Penn State transferrable to any other future college or university. Next summer the program will expand to three weeks, from July 8, 2018 through July 29, 2018. One three-credit class will be offered through that program. BVRS is recruiting for college students with at least one year of college completed, to work as a Resident Assistant or resident supervisor to support this BVRS program. Positions will be posted in January, 2018. Penn State will be doing the hiring. Any eligible person will be considered, including people with disabilities and BVRS/BBVS customers. Resident Assistants and Resident Supervisors must have completed at least one year of college.

The first year of pre-employment transition services has been completed and spent twenty million dollars. Right on target with regard to the guidelines of the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA). This program concentrates on high school students. BVRS and BBVS have always provided these services, but the WIOA passed in 2014 kicked that up to a whole new level. This enables work experience programs and summer programs to take place for the students to help young people experience work, college life, etc.

This past summer the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing program took place at Penn State main campus and 22 students participated. It was two weeks in duration. Hoping to continue that program as well.

BBVS Report: Nicole Wade. BBVS has two vacancies, a Social work position and a VR Supervisor. Two rounds of interviews have occurred. Nicole has been told that the Social worker position will not be filled at this time. There is the possibility of obtaining an intern in Social work. This past summer the agency conducted Summer Academy at Penn State, main campus for the participants to experience a taste of college life. 23 students participated. At the end of that training one week of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) was held with 10 students participating. A Junior Summer Academy also took place at Kutztown University, and 13 students took part. This was the first year for the Junior Academy. All reports were up-lifting.

White cane day. Central Office is having an event on October 12, 2017 at the Broad Street Market from 11:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. In the past Vision Resources did have their own event. Nicole explained that in the past Central Office told Harrisburg District Office that the event would be planned and executed by Central Office, and she said "that dismantled" what Harrisburg BBVS D.O. was planning to do. Stephanie asked for more information, but Nicole did not have any further information, just had a "save the date" flyer. In 2016 there was an event on the

Capitol steps. October is National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month. Activities are being planned.

Update on Competitive Integrated Employment.

Everything seems to be changing based on what the agency was told. It is getting less restrictive. Decisions are being made on a case-by-case basis. No changes to services currently being provided to customers, but as new customers are served, an assessment must be made. Certain job titles will be affected. She said there are no homemakers any more. That job title did help counselors with their Status 26 closures, but also helped customers build skills and prepare for competitive integrated work. Elaine Welch commented that this disproportionately affects women, and she believes BBVS should still have the ability to serve people who start out as homemakers.

Chris Ament spoke about other professional groups he associates with. Another group just made comments about a State Plan. Is this an opportunity for this CAC to provide a statement with regard to the Homemaker role in a formal manner? Stephanie said it was. Stephanie, however, was unsure who should receive the comments. Kay Macsi thought the Secretary of Labor and Industry should be hearing our comments about the validity of Homemaker as an occupational choice and that it should be counted as a successful VR closure. Any individual or entity could make comments on the State Plan. If anyone cares to make comments, send them to Cathy Long to compile and she will distribute to the group for review and wordsmithing. We all agreed by vote that people would send their

comments to Cathy. Note: as I write these minutes in November, 2017, no comments were ever received from anyone. Elaine asked that BBVS and BVRS send out to customers requesting comments.

New Business. Frank Abror commented about the new requirements for customers to complete forms on line. He believes this is inappropriate, because it will disenfranchise people who do not have the ability to do so. Pat Kane said these are new regulations from the WIOA as re-authorized. Customers need to do some things on line through the Job Gateway Program but if they call into BVRS, give their address, they are mailed instructions on how to do it. Pat has been hearing from customers that this takes about ten minutes. They have also heard that customers do not have access to the internet, do not have skills, and in that case they can come into BVRS in the office and do it. No one is being denied services based on skill level and on the BBVS side, availability of and acquisition of assistive technology to even use a computer. It can be done in the BBVS BVRS District Office. For BBVS this requirement is only for the Vocational Rehabilitation program. People receiving Independent Living Older Blind services are exempt from this requirement. Nicole added that this is a mandate. There are many concerns with regard to it. BBVS sends out the email, and if they cannot do it for any reason, BBVS staff does it over the phone with customers. Nicole explained that this change helps customers become eligible faster. Stephanie reviewed her experience when a counselor would complete the form in consultation with the

customer, and then the handwritten document would then be taken to the Office. Not sure if these documents were ever typed up at that time. Pat explained the reason why this is better for the agency to capture service activity. Previously before forms were able to be completed by customers on line or counselors or agency staff, hours of service were not captured appropriately and now it is all captured and in the computer under the customer's identification number, compiled nicely and kept together, unlike unwieldy paper case records. This data is backed up every night. The pre-application process is just a little bit of information. Things like releases from doctors will occur later in the process after the customer has met with his/her VR counselor. Each customer must have an e-mail address. If they do not have one, the agency assists them to create one.

Kay Macsi asked about the SSP program for people who are deaf-blind. She asked about the status of it. Cathy gave Kay information on Marsha Drenth at the Center for Independent Living. In brief, funding is much less than it was previously, which means that each customer eligible to receive services have fewer service hours now. Instead of receiving 14 hours a week, they now receive only 5 hours. Some of our deaf-blind customers receive reader service, and that pretty much is all that they can get done with an SSP now.

Cathy Long spoke about the Pa. Council of the Blind (PCB) Conference/Convention. There will be a low vision symposium and is geared to assist people who are losing

vision, adjusting to it, and family members and friends of those individuals. Strategies, techniques and exhibitors will be available to support the seminar. The theme for the PCB Conference/Convention this year is "Designing our Future". Cathy said she always learns new things when she attends the annual conference/convention. They will have an indoor navigational app for people to get around the hotel, created by the Carnegie Mellon University, and the app is called NavCog. This app allows one to pretend to be somewhere and map out a route from this place to that place virtually. Next year the theme will be "Sewing the Seeds of Success". Cathy explained a little more about how the app creators place beacons in the hotel, much like GPS communicates with cars when on the road.

Regarding elections for CAC, Nicole asked for clarifications on how this will work. Stephanie responded we will elect people in December. We believe BVRS and BBVS have sent e-mails to a multitude of eligible people. Most choose not to attend this meeting. We are unsure how we can hold a successful election, based on the numbers who participate in these meetings. Could a non-customer do it, example, a member of an agency? We believe so. Chris asked what the plan is if no one is interested. We have no clue. BBVS and BVRS will make sure the flyer explains that elections will be held and invite customers to attend in December, 2017. They will do mass mailings, mostly by e-mail to keep costs down but generally if something is mailed to a customer within a certain timeframe, the letter about CAC elections will be inserted. CAC truly does appreciate these efforts.

There are some successful CACS in the Commonwealth. We need to communicate, especially with Pittsburgh and Wilkes-Barre District Offices to determine what they are doing differently to draw people in.

John Horst discussed legislative things going on that will affect our constituency. Some of these services that could be affected are services to children with disabilities. Also, there is proposed regulations that could affect the Randolph-Sheppard and Little Randolph-Sheppard Acts and highway vending now only enjoyed by people who are legally blind. The government seems to want to open that opportunity for private business, jeopardizing the employment of several hundred blind vendors. A third piece of legislation concerns the Americans with Disabilities Act and deals with extending claims on public businesses that are still not accessible. After a claim is made, the business owner has more time to either appeal or make the property accessible, and this only occurs after a complaint is made by someone with a disability. I guess if nobody complains and they have had about 20 years to get their property into compliance already, but without a complaint, some choose never to do it. There is something called Grandfathered in that protects businesses from spending money to improve accessibility to their building or within the building. Cathy stated the Commonwealth is considering cutting funds for paratransit services by 12% and next week she is going to visit legislators at the Capitol about this. We did discuss the state budget that

still has not been passed and the hardship imposed on nonprofit organizations.

Elaine discussed a contract the Pa. Association for the Blind (PAB) has had with BBVS since 1974 to provide prevention of blindness services and other services to people who are blind or visually impaired. This year the contract was moved out of OVR and services will be provided not through the Department of Labor and Industry, rather, through the Department of Human Services, previously known as the Department of Public Welfare. Programs will be restructured. PAB did a statewide comprehensive needs assessment. Focus was not on Vocational Rehabilitation. Other services were looked at. The needs assessment told the PAB that older blind people need services. Since OVR's mission is to provide employment services, and 93 percent of the people the Pa. Association for the Blind works with are older, the services this agency provides are consistent with the mission of OVR. When BBVS was in the Department of Public Welfare, it worked well, but now under Labor and Industry, these are federally funded and state dollars so PAB is working on how services will be provided. Younger people with a vocational goal will be referred to OVR. In those areas where Independent Living Older Blind people are served by BBVS, PAB is saying they will bridge the gap imposed by the \$500 limit on services for older blind through BBVS. To achieve this goal, Elaine Welch continues to consult with the Department of Human Services. We look forward to hearing more about this. Elaine says this will be good for

everyone. Some questions were asked but because of the unique situations people face and because negotiations are ongoing, Ms. Welch could not respond. She did say it will require good communication between the state agency and PAB forward. Anyone who is OVR-eligible and comes to PAB will be referred to OVR. Conversely, Elaine Welch hopes that OVR will forward customers OVR cannot serve well and appropriately due to financial restrictions imposed on the state agency, back to the PAB to render services to those individuals.

Frank Abror commented about the Chairmanship of this Committee. He is hopeful that BVRS and BBVS do all that they can to get more people here. I believe they already are. In the event this does not work out, we will not have a Chair. We may need to elect an interim Chair. Stephanie responded that the Chair is elected in December. The current Chair continues to serve until the March, 2018 meeting according to Stephanie. The BBVS Coordinator is Ruth Lotz (rulotz@pa.gov) and the BVRS Coordinator is Pat Kane (patkane@pa.gov).

This meeting ran a little bit over the allotted time, and at about 1:20 p.m. Cathy moved for adjournment, since she knew her ride was coming soon. This motion was not seconded, but all in the room heartily agreed.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Long, Secretary