

Harrisburg District Bureau Of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Bvrs) And Bureau Of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, September 14, 2016

In attendance by phone: Norma Flinchbaugh, BBVS customer.

Present in the room were:

Stephanie Varner, Chair, CAC.

Frank Abror, VR Supervisor, Harrisburg BBVS, and CAC Coordinator for this Committee.

Patrick Kane, VR Supervisor, BVRS.

Nicole Wade, District Administrator, BBVS.

Judy Stammermon, BVRS customer.

Lorraine Finnacle, parent of a BVRS customer.

Ed Martin, OVR customer.

Danette Blank, Executive Director, Vision Resources of Central PA.

Kelsi Bowman, BBVS customer.

Don Rubinski, BVRS customer.

Elaine Welch, CEO, Pa. Association for the Blind.

Kay Macsi, employed by VisionCorps

Chris Ament, employed by VisionCorps.

Russ Bodanyuk, OVR customer.

Sarah Ballard, VisionCorps Customer.

Alicia Thomas, VisionCorps customer.

Raleigh Tonkin, OVR customer.

Michelle Pritta, certified peer specialist, Dauphin County Mental Health, and customer.

Daniel Larew, OVR customer.

Randall love, previous OVR customer.

Curtis Freeman, OVR customer.

Joe Strechay, Director, BBVS.

Dave Barrett, OVR customer.

Virgil Gibulterra, OVR customer.

John Horst, Pa. Council of the Blind.

Trudy Lehman, customer.

Yolanda Mitchell, OVR customer.

Ron Davis, Business Services Counselor, BVRS.

Austin Granzia, OVR customer.

Cathy Long, Secretary of CAC, representing Capital City Council of the Blind.

Connie Moonen, OVR Executive Secretary.

David DeNotaris, Executive Director, OVR.

Janice Mazzitti, District Administrator, BVRS (came in during meeting)

Note: Names of individuals in attendance were spelled phonetically or my best guess. Apologize in advance for any misspelling.

John Horst made a motion to approve the minutes for the June CAC meeting. Danette Blank seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Many thanks to Kay Macsi and Chris Ament for transporting several of their customers here to Harrisburg to attend this meeting.

David began by saying it was a pleasure to attend this CAC meeting and he appreciated our taking our time to attend. He introduced his colleague, Joe Strechay and provided some of Joe's background. David said he is interested in hearing what the agency is doing well and what needs improvement. However, we cannot discuss individual cases in this public forum. If there is an individual concern, someone from BBVS or BVRS can speak with you after this meeting. David has been employed with OVR since 2007. He previously worked in New Jersey as the Director of Manager Services and the residential programs. OVR's mission is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve independence and employment. OVR houses four Bureaus: BBVS with 165 staff in six District Offices, BVRS with 15 District Offices and 700 staff, The Hiram G. Andrews Center, a comprehensive Rehab Center in Johnstown, PA with 200 staff, and the

Bureau of Central Operations, doing all the administrative work, 50 staff. The Office of Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing, provides information and advocacy services for people who are hard of hearing and deaf. He did not relay how many staff are employed in ODHH.

Before David continued, he gave the microphone over to Joe Strechay, who spoke briefly about BBVS. Joe discussed the programs BBVS offers: Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB), Children's services, Specialized Services-Children, Specialized Services-Adults, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) youth and working-age adults, and the Business Enterprises Program (BEP). These programs work with customers and provide direct services by professionals, helping customers (consumers) work towards independence and employment. ILOB and for the most part Specialized Services do not have an employment goal, but services are provided to assist the individual to be as independent as possible in the home setting.

And now we got down to business. David spoke about the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) which goes into effect September 30, 2016, and how this will impact upon services in Pennsylvania. The Act re-authorizes the Rehabilitation Act and this is why we need to take notice of this new Act. The emphasis, according to David, are communication, collaboration, and coordination. A statewide team of individuals from the Departments of Education, Human Services, (used to be known as Welfare, Labor and Industry, Transportation, and Economic Development have come together to collaborate about how we can assist our employers and businesses in Pennsylvania, as well as our workers and individuals looking for work. The emphasis is on skill development for workers, and those seeking employment. David introduced Ron Davis and the work Ron and his co-worker, Jeff Dreibelbis, in the Harrisburg District Office is doing with businesses. WIOA emphasizes employer engagement. Ron works with customers to prepare them for the interview, and every aspect leading up to it. Employment must be competitive integrated employment.

Pre-employment transition services are provided to high school students to secure employment when not in school. Could be evening, weekend, or summer jobs. Statistics tell us that students with disabilities who have part-time employment are 2.5 times more likely to find employment than those who do not have a part-time job. Therefore 15 percent of the VR budget is set aside to assist students with disabilities to gain part-time employment while in school, but not during the school day of course. This is a shift from what OVR has done in the past. Much time is spent working on this goal.

Another major undertaking is sub-minimum Wage 511. All individuals who are likely to work in a sheltered shop must be evaluated by OVR to determine correct suitability for

sheltered shop employment. The Department of Education claims there are over 105,000 students with disabilities in PA with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans, and each year between 700 and one thousand students leave high school and enter sheltered employment. So OVR must have knowledge of these students in order to determine the appropriateness of sheltered shop placement for them. This is taking considerable effort by OVR.

BBVS has a three-week summer program for college-bound high school students who are blind and visually impaired. The program takes place at Penn State University with the College of Health and Human Development, the college of Education and Rehabilitation Services. And this past year also partnered with Science University. Only two percent of students with disabilities enter the fields of science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). That's why OVR reached out to the College of Science. Now 12 students are in college working toward a career in some part of STEM.

At the Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia, another summer program occurs to assist students who are not college-bound to work on independence and to prepare students for post-high school opportunities. Half of that day is devoted to working in the community.

The Business Enterprises Program will no longer be headquartered at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) but trainees will be trained by various Business Enterprises Operators in Harrisburg, PA in full service facilities. This provides real life work opportunities in a functioning food service operation.

Soon the Governor will release his Executive Order: Employment First. This will be the first option and preferred outcome for any state-funded program. Many of the above-mentioned agencies have collaborated together to provide input.

OVR has a huge social media presence. If you have a Facebook or Twitter account, or linked-in account, follow OVR to receive information from us. Success stories are posted there.

David also talked about the number of contracts provided to community organizations to help customers in the community.

Comments from participants were heard. Without providing details on what their specific concerns were, we heard from Stephanie Varner, testing for Civil Service. Michelle Pritta. Another Civil Service concern. Federal government versus State Government. Danette Blank asked for clarification about OVR evaluation before students go to sheltered employment. Janice Mazzitti gave more details about how BVRS is handling this. Alicia Thomas with concerns for VR services. Nicole Wade will follow up. Kay Macsi questioned extensive waiting lists. The need for a VR counselor and Social Worker in Lancaster County. David advises the long wait is almost over. Sarah Ballard regarding delayed services and the long wait. Nicole Wade will follow up with Sarah. David will be keeping in touch with Joe Strechay, Nicole Wade, and the VR supervisor to assure that things begin to move in the right direction. A gentleman has the need for BVRS services. Janice Mazzitti will speak with him after the meeting. John Horst asked for flexibility from the District Office on urgent cases. Joe Strechay agrees. Have the customer call BBVS regularly. David recommended while the individual is waiting to enter training, pursue on-line training with Hadley Institute. Randy Love has a friend who recently lost vision. How can he help his friend? David said contact BBVS, a peer support group, consumer-driven, such as Pa. Council of the Blind or National Federation of the Blind. In this way your friend will meet other people who are blind and doing things with their lives, which can inspire your friend. Peer groups really can help because the people in them have "been there, done that!" The Client Assistance Program can help people who are finding it difficult to receive services from BVRS and BBVS. The toll-free number is 888-745-2357. Their regular number is 215-557-7112. Kelsi Bowman asked a question about new programs and received an answer. Elaine Welch asked about the new Assistive Technology positions. She received a response from David. The idea of providing services through peer mentors was discussed. David also talked about on-the-job training money. Trudy Lehman talked about the lack of transportation in a small town. This is a barrier to employment. David said they continue to talk with the Department of Transportation. He said one state is contracting with UBER to provide some transportation services. He also stated that people with disabilities are the best problem solvers in the world. Employers are looking for that kind of person who thinks outside of the box and shows problem-solving ingenuity. An OVR customer spoke about the need for public transportation at night and Sundays. Cathy Long spoke about her work with the CAT Advisory Committee for people with Disabilities. Her contact information is as follows: Home number: 717-732-5265. Cell phone number: 717-991-7433. E-mail: klingonwoman@verizon.net. Next CAT Advisory Committee meeting for people with Disabilities is Tuesday, December 6, 2016 from 12:30 until 2:00 p.m. at the CAT offices: 901 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA. For Special share ride complaints call 717-232-6104, extension 135 and ask for Sherry Marks.

This ended the meeting. Please put the next meeting on the calendar. It will be at the BVRS and BBVS conference room, just as it is today, and will be held on Wednesday, December 14, 2016 from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cathy Long, Secretary