

**GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED**

**SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

**40 FOUNTAIN STREET**

**THIRD FLOOR**

**PROVIDENCE, RI 02903**

**MINUTES**

**June 13, 2005**

**Members Present: Donald Deignan, Richard Gaffney, Raymond Dettore, Charles Brown, Elizabeth Graves and Ralph Iannitelli**  
**Quorum requirements were met.**

**Staff Present: Linda Hughes, Susan Shapiro and Gary Wier**

**Guests Present: Robert Kinder, M.D.**

**Approval of Minutes:**

**The minutes of the March 21, 2005 meeting had been previously distributed. A motion to accept the minutes as presented was made by Ralph Iannitelli and seconded by Elizabeth Graves. The minutes**

**were accepted and approved.**

### **Introduction of Guests/Agenda:**

**Chairman Donald Deignan began by introducing the GAC members to Dr reviewed the agenda and the order of presentations was altered to allow Susan Shapiro to update the GAC first.**

### **Benefits Planning, Assistance & Outreach:**

**Susan Shapiro noted that this program is a grant funded program that provides information on how work will impact on benefits to individuals with disabilities who receive SSI or SSDI. For individuals who have visual impairments it is an opportunity to learn about work incentives, particularly those that are available only to people who are blind. Last year over 325 individuals met with one of the two benefit specialists (one part-time, one fulltime), and this year it appears that even more will receive service.**

### **Ticket to Work:**

**Susan continued with an update concerning Ticket to Work, one of a variety of work incentives under the Social Security programs for people with disabilities. It allows a recipient to select a provider for services that will enable a person to become employed. Providers,**

known as Employment Networks, can accept or reject applicants for service, with the exception of Vocational Rehabilitation. The vocational rehabilitation unit at ORS/Services for the Blind accepts all eligible individuals. Response to this program has been slow. At the present time, ORS has accepted approximately 75 tickets, out of 43,000+ that have been distributed to Rhode Islanders. For people who are blind, there appears to be little personal advantage to using a ticket, other than knowing that they are enabling the agency to recoup some funds from Social Security if the individual earns enough to go off benefits.

#### **Youth Leadership Forum:**

Susan Shapiro continued by presenting information on the Youth Leadership Forum to be held on August 8 – 11 at Camp Canonicus in Exeter. The program accepts high school juniors and seniors who demonstrate leadership ability. Its purpose is to help youths plan for their future as they transition from high school. Many speakers and staff are people with disabilities and serve as role models and possible mentors to the youth who participate in the forum. This year, nine students have been accepted and two more await interviews.

#### **SBVI's 75th Anniversary:**

In celebration of this event, the agency is sponsoring a one day

**symposium, “Visual Impairment: Past, Present and Future Perspectives”. The event will take place on September 15, 2005 from 9:00 am- 4:00pm at the Radisson Hotel in Warwick. Presentations on advances in medical treatment, technology, and service delivery will take place. Vignettes will show what life was like for a person who was blind in the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and how it might be in the year 2020. The luncheon will celebrate the accomplishments of SBVI. Don Deignan has researched and written a monograph that details the history of the agency. This will be featured at the event along with other information on this interesting and changing period of service delivery for the field.**

**Newsline: (Linda Hughes) According to a recent Providence Journal Bulletin article, this newspaper is now available on Newsline. Richard Gaffney and Gary Wier recently made telephone calls to John Pare to determine the status of the Journal, and then the article appeared in the newspaper. It was presumed that the article was provided by NFB as there was no mention of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Linda did report that as a response to the article, 10 people registered for Newsline, an increase from the 5 registered in the 2 previous months. Since the agency began sponsorship of the program, the number of registered listeners has increased from 80 to 177, (221%) and the number of active listeners also increased 212%. Gary Wier reported that some of the residual funding for the program has been used to partially fund Linda Hughes’ salary as she has been**

administering the program. It is anticipated that once the program is up and running efficiently, this will become a secretarial function. The next step will be the publicity involved with the addition of the Journal. A letter informing all registered listeners of the addition of the Journal to "Newsline" will be mailed out. Social workers, rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation teachers will be informed of the addition and encouraged to give applications to all new clients. A notice of the program will be mailed out in September with all calendars to 1200 agency clients. Additional details surrounding the next steps to publicize the program will be discussed in a meeting to be scheduled with Gary Wier, Linda Hughes and Richard Gaffney.

**The Social Service/Independent Living for Older Blind Unit: (Linda Hughes)** The monthly reports were dispensed and reviewed. Active caseloads average 472 a month, with new cases averaging 51 a month and successful deactivations averaging 39 a month.

721 individuals received services through the Independent Living for Older Blind Program, which provided the ancillary services, (rehabilitation teaching, mobility instructions, low vision evaluations and provision of adaptive aids and equipment,) for the clients over the age of seventy. Results of the satisfaction surveys remain among the highest in the country, with 97% of the individuals served reporting an increase in their ability to remain independent, which is a remarkable achievement given the age and infirmity of most of the clients. Amazingly, 31% of the individuals who reported that they were considering a nursing home placement prior to receiving

agency services were able to remain in their own homes as the result of these services.

The difficulty in providing services to children, especially birth to three years old, was discussed in light of the Legislative Commission to Review Services to Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired. Linda Hughes reported that there are now 44 infants and toddlers who are blind or visually impaired. The agency is providing limited services on a case by case basis of a low vision service specialist who is coordinating functional vision evaluations and consultations with all Early Intervention Centers. It is anticipated that this position will become a Datalogic position in order to streamline the funding. Services of an orientation and mobility instructor for this age and older children, a case manager and transition to VR coordinator, and a rehabilitation teacher for children are also needed services.

**Camp Mauchatea: (Linda Hughes)** It was reported that applications have gone out for campers and counselors. A teenager/young adult group will be added to the camp as this group of individuals need and greatly enjoy the support of camp, and it can be seen as a pre-vocational time when older themes and activities of daily living can be discussed. IN-Sight has agreed to provide rehabilitation teaching, and a student teacher mobility instructor will be on hand to discuss mobility issues. A tentative schedule has been set up, with a multi-cultural music theme again used. For example, one day the campers will be going to Mystic Seaport where they will experience the food, games, dress and music of the colonial times, and have an

opportunity to go on a sailing vessel. Another day, there will be a golf tournament led by a blind golf pro, with a participatory Celtic musical program in the evening. Funding is provided by the Lions Sight Foundation, with a majority of their funding coming from the Narragansett Lions Club. The agency sponsors the cost of the buses and the awards, as well as their staff time. A \$2,000 grant from the State Council on the Arts was also obtained to pay for the music program.

**Vision Screening Program: (Linda Hughes)** It was reported that Saving Sight screened 17,000 children which the agency was able to fund. They reached this goal in March, and will not screen any more children until September. They found 700 children to be in need of an optometric examination, and 625 received eyeglasses as a result of the program.

An adult vision screening program was piloted April through June. A total of 12 screenings at a cost of \$200 each were conducted at minority health centers in an effort to reach those most in need of an eye examination. It is not yet known whether any potential agency clients were identified as Linda Hughes will review the eye reports at the conclusion of the project in order to determine whether it is beneficial to continue to fund the adult screenings.

**Commission on Vision Services Update:**

Donald Deignan reported that the Commission to Promote and

**Develop a Comprehensive System of Education for Visually Impaired Children continues to meet. A final report is currently being drafted and Don, who serves as Secretary to the Commission, has had the responsibility to develop the final document in preparation for dissemination to legislators and the general public. This is still in process and is expected to be available sometime before the end of 2005. The report will contain an SBVI proposal to add one Social Caseworker, one Mobility instructor and a Functional Vision Specialist to establish a Children's unit within SBVI. The Commission is scheduled to sunset in January, 2006.**

#### **ORS/SBVI Update:**

**Gary Wier reported that SBVI is currently at full staff, with all available FTE's filled. The efforts that the Administrator of ORS, Raymond Carroll, has made to assist the agency in this regard are appreciated. Gary has been working closely with the administration of ORS and DHS in an effort to build support for additional personnel resources to improve children's services at SBVI. This effort parallels efforts currently being made at the Commission level to improve the service delivery system used for children who are blind or visually impaired. There has been no decrease in the agency's budget. Instead, funds have increased due to the Newsline legislation and the federal COLA.**

**Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and State Rehabilitation**

## **Council (SRC):**

**Elizabeth Graves reviewed reports that had been previously distributed. Topics covered included the Region I RSA SRC training, SRC activities including assistance with the ORS State Plan, the NCIL Conference to be held on 7/11-14, 2005 and the SILC Leadership Development Workshop to be held on June 22nd at the Warwick Public Library. (See Reports)**

## **Miscellaneous:**

**Gary Wier noted that Deborah Barton's position was due for re-appointment. Gary will follow-up with her to determine her intentions in this regard. Don Deignan has followed up with Robert Connor who has informed the agency that he is resigning. Several possibilities were discussed as individuals that have experience and might be interested in serving on the GAC. Efforts will be made to recommend individuals and fill vacancies as soon as possible.**

## **Next Meeting(s):**

**The following remaining meeting dates have been discussed and agreed upon for 2005:**

**Monday, September 26, 2005**

**Monday, December 5, 2005**

**Unless notified otherwise, all meetings will be held at 4:00PM at Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 40 Fountain Street, Third Floor Training Room C, Providence, Rhode Island.**

**Meeting was adjourned at 5:30pm**