

**GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND AND
VISUALLY IMPAIRED
SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
40 FOUNTAIN STREET
FIRST FLOOR
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903**

MINUTES:

September 14, 2015

Members Present: Donald Deignan – Chairperson GAC; Graciela Pires – President NFB of RI / GAC Member; Elizabeth Graves – GAC Member / SRC; John Pimental – Vice President of NFB of RI / GAC Member; Barbara Walsh – GAC Member; Donna Elliott – GAC Member / NFB of RI

Members Not Present: Rick Costa – SILC Member/Representative; Al Williams – GAC member; Ralph Ianitelli – GAC Member;

Staff Present: Laurie DiOrio –Administrator SBVI; Patricia Robert – Data Entry Operator, ORS

Staff Not Present: Sandy Pritko, ILOB Supervisor; Rebecca Cloutier – Case Aide SBVI; Melanie Sbardella, SBVI VR Supervisor

Guest: Regina Connors, Former Assistant Administrator at ORS

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

At 4:17 pm the quarterly meeting for the GAC was called to order.

Motion to approve minutes from June 8, 2015, seconded by John Pimental. Unanimously approved.

Technological Literacy among Senior Citizens with Blindness or Impairments – Preliminary Presentation

- **Regina Connors, Guest, addressed concerns with technological literacy among senior citizens with blindness and visual impairments.**
- **Technology can be a great benefit for people with disabilities but also can create obstacles to their independence.**
- **Many aspects of technology are not necessarily accessible to those with vision loss, it can be complicated, complex, steep learning curve, as well as an on-going learning process.**
- **The services SBVI is providing under the IL elder blind program meet some of the needs of the population but there may be technology that exists that can do more than the technology they are providing at the present time. (Ex. Ipad)**
- **Concerns about training, on-going tech support that individuals with disabilities might require to maximize the device. Where does someone get the support?**
- **Services are available to individuals on the VR side through the assistance of the vision rehab teacher. It would also make sense to have services available on the IL side.**
- **Can services can be provided through the existing staff? Training the staff through a program provided through RSA, technical assistance that can bring them up to the skills necessary to provide those services to that population.**
- **Chairperson suggested conducting a special meeting to discuss this topic in further detail. Invite those agencies and/or organizations who provide such services and possibly establishing a conference in**

the spring.

- Response from SBVI – defer to Sandy Pritko in terms of AT technology
- Look at collaborating with In-Sight, OSCIL, TechACCESS all agencies that do technology. Possibility of hiring another functional vision specialist to do high tech rehab teaching.
- Possibility of coordinating a group class on technology
- The goal is the need for training and finding adaptive technology that will still be useful for some years to come without it being the newest thing on the block
- Some resources to consider: the ATAP conference coming November 19th & 20th
- NFB Conference to be held on October 23 @ Radisson from 1-4

Social Services – Update

- Sandy Pritko was not in attendance – there was no report provided at this time.

ORS Update – Laurie DiOrio

- As of August 8th Laurie DiOrio was appointed Assistant Administrator for the Blind

BEP Update – Laurie DiOrio

- No major updates since last meeting.
- Renovated the URI facility at the Shepard Building
- Will be deviating from renovation this year
- No openings for vendors at this time

SILC Update – Liz Graves

- On June 24th & 25th SILC underwent a two day meeting with Elizabeth Akinola, IL Unit Representative, Administration of Community Living (ACL), US Department of Human Resources
- She was here to address the non-compliance of the SILC to the regulations of Section 705 of the Rehabilitation Act in order to maintain the Part B funding supporting the SILC and OSCIL's Home Modification Program
- SILC agreed to several assurances by September 30th to stay in compliance
- One ramification from the meeting is the restructure of the SILC.
- Council members are rewriting the SILC by-laws along with policy and procedures
- SILC members and staff will receive training from Paula McElwee, ILRU Training Specialist during October/November.
- 2014-2015 Needs Assessment Survey completed
- The Needs Assessment Committee (NAC) is working on the survey results and a report

VR UPDATE – Melanie Sbardella

- Melanie Sbardella was not in attendance but an update was provided
- Focus on more up-front assessments and information
- Barriers for employment outcomes are getting good occupational, therapy evaluations, speech, etc.
- Opening up to doing more in-house training on keyboarding and tablet use. The rehab teacher on staff utilizing an initial assessment tool on figuring out what can and cannot do.
- VR trying to get people assessed and evaluated for job ready.

- **Consent Decree, evaluations are more important because individuals are not only I/DD also blind and/or visually impaired in many cases multiply challenged.**

State Rehabilitation Counsel (SRC) – Liz Graves

- **There is nothing at this time to report. Next meeting is scheduled in October**
- **The state plan does not to be rewritten this year. Waiting for direction on how the state plan will be written with the SRC as well as other agencies involvement**

Status Update for Tax Exemption

- **Barbara Walsh will present information to her state senator for her to introduce amendment legislation concerning the way blind or visually impaired people are treated from a tax assessment point of view with registration of service animals and property tax exemption.**

MISCELLANEOUS

- **OSCIL business has expanded since the closure of PARI – they are also hiring**
- **NFB Convention will be October 23rd & 24th, at the Radisson from 1:00 – 4:00. This year's representative coming to speak is Mark Morra, past president of the NFB.**
- **Through URI the DOT sponsored a program consulting high school students interested in the Engineering Transportation Program.**
- **The Ocean State Theater will be showing the Miracle Worker**

- **Pursue discussion on the issues brought up by Regina O'Connor as noted above. Email Don with ideas names of people and organizations that might be interested in being involved in a future meeting.**
- **Would like to put together a conference in the spring that would ventilate these issues to interested people from a variety of points of view.**
- **Next meeting 12/14/15, 40 Fountain Street, Providence, RI 02903 – First Floor Large Conference Room – 4:00**
- **Meeting adjourned at 5:20 PM**