

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

December 10, 2021

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present:

Cathy Wilson, Chris Alejano, Christopher Zilar, Corey Grandstaff, Jacob Kamaunu, Jerri Clark, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Kim Conner, Kristin Geary, Linda Wilder, Marci Carpenter, Michael MacKillop, Steve Fiksdal

Council Members Absent:

Sean McCormick, Sheila Turner

Staff and Visitors Present:

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Tricia Eyerly, Jeannie Brown, Lisa Wheeler, LaDell Lockwood, Kim Canaan, Alice Klein, Alco Canfield, Carl Jarvis, Nathan Brannon, Doug Burkhalter

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair

Meeting was called to order at 9:03 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Julie reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Approval of September 2021 Minutes:

Christopher moved and Jen seconded to accept the September 2021 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Election for SRC-B Chair and Vice-Chair

Christopher led the election process for Chair and Vice-Chair of the council. He read statements from Julie Brannon for Chair and Linda Wilder for Vice-Chair.

The Chair position was opened for nominations from the floor, and no additional candidates were nominated. Corey moved to accept Julie as the Chair, Marci seconded, and the motion passed.

The Vice-Chair position was opened for nominations from the floor, and no additional candidates were nominated. Corey moved to accept Linda as the Vice-Chair, Marci seconded, and the motion passed.

This will be the second year in their positions for both Julie and Linda.

Meet New OTC Manager: Ron Jasmer

Ron started at DSB in mid November, the current term of OTC students had just started the week before he joined DSB. Ron came from WA State School for the Blind (WSSB) previously where he worked as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and taught Orientation and Mobility (O&M) for the past five years. Ron has a wide breadth of experience with blindness and low vision, mainly because he has a visual impairment himself, from retinitis pigmentosa diagnosed when he was three years old. Ron has a Master's in Education and Special Education, attended Portland State University for both his O&M and TVI training, and recently completed his Certificate in School Administration there as well. He is really excited about working at the OTC and being part of DSB, he feels there is a cultural shift happening and wants to be part of it as the agency moves forward.

Corey – What are plans for non-resident students? Ron said DSB is continuing with current model, which is hybrid at this time with some services offered remotely. Lisa clarified that means offering in-person services in participants' homes plus commuter students.

Marci – How often are students getting O&M training? Teachers create their schedule based on participant need, which is assessed and prioritized, plus the added factor of staff and participants' schedules, and now weather impacts.

Marci also extended an invitation to Ron to come speak at the next NFBW Convention, scheduled for November 4-6, 2022.

Corey – Is DSB looking at other residential facilities for ideas? Ron said yes, they are part of regular community of practice calls to share experiences and ideas with other state residential facilities.

Lisa shared that several DSB managers attended the recent virtual National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) Conference, and this was a big topic of discussion for all the centers. They heard from Colorado, New Mexico, and World Services for the Blind. Questions centered on how to keep staff and students safe while providing training, and every center's response has been slightly different.

Linda commented welcome to DSB, she loved her job as a counselor. She also attended the OTC when she first lost her vision, and it was such a big help to her.

Steve – What is Ron's leadership style? Ron said he is very much a team-oriented leader. He would not ask one of his team to do anything that he is not also able and prepared to do if needed. Since he is a TVI also and loves teaching O&M, he will not hesitate to jump in and assist if needed. However, he really sees himself as part of a team, and can't do his job alone.

Kristin commented that she will miss Ron from the YES program's pre-employment mock interviews and would love to participate if/when offered in Seattle. Ron said he is very passionate about offering that at the OTC, just haven't been able to do it yet.

Acting Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

Michael made a Native land acknowledgement for Seattle and Tacoma. It is very busy at the Agency right now! Better than 2020, there have been good changes. Had the vaccine mandate implemented, and DSB staff are 100% compliant. DSB returned to offices on Oct 19th and re-opened doors to the public. Many state agencies not starting back in person until January. It is taking time to get used to being back in person. However, it's important to the work DSB does and helps with teaming. The OTC has reopened with six residential students, one per apartment. Possible move to two students per apartment in March. Good to have fewer for now as everyone gets used to being in person again. One of the main benefits to being at the OTC is more intensive skills training, such as daily O&M training and adaptive skills of blindness. DSB is still offering remote OTC attendance as well, but wants to have more instruction in person as soon as possible.

Working with the Office of Financial Management (OFM) regarding what protections DSB can have in place, in regards to the OTC. For example, we are not able to require vaccinations for residential students. Will be relying on counseling, coaching, and information sharing with potential residential students to ensure they have all the knowledge they need to stay safe in the residential apartments. Michael said DSB is open to any input/suggestions that council members might have in regards to this issue.

There was a large wave of retirements in 2021, plus a few people who have left the agency for other opportunities. Working on recruitments to fill those positions thoughtfully. Have been very lucky to find phenomenal people for these recruitments. Other agencies have not been as fortunate in filling their open positions.

We've recently added Ron Jasmer as the new OTC manager, and he comes with such great background. Carl Peterson as the Business Relations Manager, and he is exactly who we need in that position. Deja Powell has moved to the Youth Services Manager position, and she's very excited to lead that team forward. Bianca Kolle is the new South Area Regional Manager (RAM).

The currently vacant HR position was changed to include Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Program management. Michael gave a shout out to council members who have helped with community interviews and recommendations on some of our recent new hires.

CSAVR had a two-week virtual conference that many DSB managers attended. Michael was on several panels. He also thanked the local NFBW and WCB conventions for inviting Michael and Lisa to present on the future of work and share about the agency.

Independent Living program is finding that Older Blind are wanting more technology and training to use it. Michael is really appreciative of Kim Canaan's efforts to reach an agreement with the WA

Talking Book and Braille Library to use their Free Matter mailing to ship out IL devices. Handheld magnifiers continue to be the most requested device. Kim was able to use unspent funds to buy more tech devices for the contractors to have in their kits.

The BEP continues to be impacted by the lack of customer base at most operator sites. DSB has a big ask in to the State Legislature for \$7.5M in budget funds to overhaul each existing BEP facility over the next five years to improve profitability. OFM is leading the conversation between the Legislature and DSB about the budget ask. Hopeful we will get the money, with the support from OFM. Michael will let the council know if DSB needs them to assist with education about the ask.

DSB had applied for a demonstration grant from RSA, but didn't get it. Have had a conversation with RSA about limitations of the small blind VR agencies to compete against larger ones for these types of opportunities.

DSB must decide whether to maintain Order of Selection (OOS) or end it. OOS is the only way to manage funds, by having a wait list. Michael said DSB is going to ask to keep it open, we anticipate a big spike in applications in the future and want to be able to respond quickly. It would take about six months to implement OOS again, if needed.

WA VR grant recipients have been notified they will be monitored by RSA in 2022, both DSB and DVR. DSB has a good relationship with our RSA team, and we want to know if there are things we need to change or improve. DSB has had a good conversation with Idaho General who went through monitoring in 2021.

DSB is planning for another Community Forum, possibly in February or March 2022. Really appreciated the support, ideas, and comments from previous forum.

Christopher commented congratulations on having OFM's support with the budget ask. Regarding the grant from RSA, knows others go so far as to hire grant writers and that it's very competitive. What is known about the RSA monitoring? Michael said it's supposed to be virtual but not sure yet what that will look like.

Jen commented that CAP supports DSB staying in OOS for at least the next couple of years.

Marci commented that NFBW is available to support the BEP budget ask.

Policy Review: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); and Respectful Work Environment

Two recent policies that DSB has added, per directions of the Governor to all State agencies. Important to recognize and end cycles of oppression. Get past our own implicit biases, and become aware of how may inadvertently be biased. Recognizing the cycle and history of oppression that is in place and working to stop promoting it unknowingly. It sets an expectation for all employees to become aware, and to act towards understanding where we may be falling short in providing an accepting and inclusive environment to all people.

The Respectful Work Environment policy gives more concrete and detailed examples of how everyone is expected to behave and interact with each other at work. For supervisors and managers, need to be recognizing their privilege and ensuring diversity is being promoted in DSB hiring practices, and that there is diversity in the agency leadership as well. The Executive Team needs to ensure that diversity is always part of the conversation and put forward as an agency value and part of the decision-making. Michael pointed out there are three questions on the annual Employee Satisfaction Survey that will be used to measure the effectiveness of this policy.

Kim Conner commented how glad she is that the Governor is promoting DEI with the creation of the Office of Equity. She wonders what is the plan for rollout and implementation with staff? She suggested that the SRC would benefit from this same training. Michael said DSB is just at the beginning stages of this training, the new policies have been rolled out, and there were two listening sessions with staff that had good feedback. He agreed that it is a challenge when every person is at a different level personally with this information and these thoughts. Many DSB staff were able to take part in the pilot DEI training that's being developed, and all staff will be going through that training in 2022. The DSB Leadership Team has met with Dr. Karen Johnson two times so far, and each person received personal recommendations for their own education.

Andy wanted to say that he thinks the policy has been well-written, and he really appreciates that this work is being rolled out to state employees.

Steve, as the Policy Committee Chair, requested that both of these policies be sent to the committee for review and feedback. Steve moved and Julie seconded the motion to have the policies sent to them.

Client Assistance Program (CAP): Jen Bean

Jen officially became the new CAP Director effective August 1st. She said it was an honor to take over from Jerry Johnsen, who was director for 40 years. There is no term limit for the CAP position on the SRC council so she plans to be here awhile. Jen shared that she has almost 25 years of experience with CAP and DVR. She's held many positions at DVR and has a really good understanding of the VR process, as well as established relationships and contacts in the community already.

Jen introduced Doug Burkhalter, who just joined her at CAP recently. Doug said he also has 20+ years of VR experience working at DVR and has held a number of positions. The majority of his career was as an Employment Specialist, working with businesses and participants to gain employment. Then he started getting calls from Jen to join her at CAP. He's excited to make this change and to work with VR clients who may need a little extra help.

Jen wanted to share some of the inspiration that guides CAP's work, starting with two quotes. One is from Jerry Johnsen, "VR is civil rights in action", and the other is from the former director of the WSRC, Joelle Bruner who said, "VR is a movement, not a program; and we are here to empower

people”. Jen takes her own personal inspiration from the quote by Theodore Roosevelt that talks about daring greatly. Even while nervous and afraid she will be there, and she will do the hard things.

CAP’s values and guiding principles use the idea of an ecosystem. The law is designed for them to be in partnership with the VR agencies, Tribal VR, and the SRCs; and there is space for creative problem-solving and implementing best practices. Jen is in agreement with Michael on the importance of succession planning and the need to develop leaders. Another guiding principle that Jen promotes is a “Yes, we can!” attitude. Whatever the issue is something can be figured out to make it work. Lastly, she said the pandemic has really pointed out the importance of self-care and has been personally reminded of that need over the past year.

CAP provides tools, is a resource, and support to the SRC also. CAP can see trends, from clients and agencies; and can help identify emerging leaders among VR staff. Please feel free to invite CAP to join workgroups and consider CAP as part of the team. Jen is chair of the same Program and Evaluation committee on the general SRC. Jen encourages all to be patient and graceful with ourselves, and remember we are not alone and are all in this together.

Lisa commented that she’s happy to see Jen in this new position, appreciates the outreach and feedback that Jen has already given DSB, and looks forward to working more closely with CAP. Jen said she and Doug will be working on training and doing more outreach to VR staff soon.

Proposed change of name and purpose of Program and Evaluation Committee, requiring Council vote and By-law change: Jen Bean

Jen inherited the Program and Evaluation Committee chair from the previous CAP director. This committee is called a couple of other things in different places. Jen proposes that the name be officially changed in the By-laws to Customer Satisfaction Committee to be in line with its intended purpose. This was the proposal from the previous CAP director and chair of this committee.

In the By-laws this committee is shown as responsible for drafting the SRC Annual Report, but all committees contribute to the report. She suggests this either be put under the Executive Committee or listed under every committee. It was agreed by Council discussion that overall responsibility for the report belongs under the Executive Committee.

Jen moved to accept both of these recommended changes in the By-laws, and Corey seconded the motion. Motion was passed.

Proposed change in SRC-B election process, requiring Council vote and By-law change: Christopher Zilar

Christopher read through draft of proposed changes to nomination and election process. (Sent to council in a separate document.) The proposed change would involve having a nominating committee which would recommend the candidates for Chair/Vice-chair to the council.

Kim Conner asked why the committee is making this recommendation instead of letting all candidates be voted on. She doesn't believe this is what's intended, more than one candidate can be moved forward to voting process.

Steve added that the proposed change is how the SRCB had conducted its elections in the past until about five years ago. Whoever was interested in running sent in a letter and a committee advised the council of their recommended candidate.

Julie clarified that nominating committees do generally bring forth their recommended candidates to the election, however there can then be nominations accepted from the floor. The committee's recommendation does not guarantee election of that person.

Corey asked clarification about how there could be a conflict of interest from a nominee. In regard to a nominating committee, he feels it could become "political" given that both blind consumer groups have members on the SRCB and could directly influence who is put forward as the favored nominee. The council is small enough that it probably doesn't need a nominating committee.

Julie replied that conflict of interest in the By-laws refers to someone who is a nominee and thus should not be part of the nominating committee. She agreed it's a valid point to ask if the SRCB actually needs a nominating committee in the election process.

Marci expressed that she has similar concerns about the possible conflict of interest with using a nominating committee, and whether it's necessary.

Linda added that the Membership Committee was charged with running the last election and there was no process in writing for them to follow. That is what has spurred on this discussion and request to add something to the By-laws.

After additional discussion this proposed change was not voted on. Instead, Steve moved to send the election process back to the Executive Committee to discuss and make proposed changes as talked about in the meeting today. Andy seconded the motion, and motion was passed.

Jen suggested that council members who have suggestions or comments about the election process to send them to the Executive Committee to have when they meet to discuss.

Discussion regarding Executive Committee’s final input for the DSB Combined State Plan: Julie Brannon, Michael MacKillop

Michael and Julie went over the 16 questions that the SRC asked DSB, and DSB’s thoughtful responses to each question. These will be included in the updated version of the Combined State Plan. This document is available separately upon request.

Public Comment

There were no public comments offered.

Wrap-Up

Kim Conner mentioned upcoming legislation to promote and support, “Nothing About Us Without Us”.

Jacob acknowledged recent loss of longtime VR supporter, Bob Dole.

It was suggested to have Carl Peterson, DSB’s new Business Engagement & Workforce Program Manager, join the March 2022 SRC meeting.

SRC 2022 Meeting Schedule

Fridays, March 11th, June 10th, September 9th, and December 9th

All meetings scheduled on Zoom from 9:00am – 12:00pm unless otherwise communicated.

Meeting Adjourned

Meeting was adjourned at 12:08 PM.