

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

March 11, 2022

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present:

Christopher Zilar, Corey Grandstaff, Jacob Kamaunu, Jerri Clark, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Kristin Geary, Linda Wilder, Marci Carpenter, Michael MacKillop, Sheila Turner, Steve Fiksdal

Council Members Absent:

Andy Arvidson, Chris Alejano, Kim Conner, Sean McCormick

Staff and Visitors Present:

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Grimes, Tricia Eyerly, Jeannie Brown, Lisa Wheeler, Carl Peterson, Kim Canaan, Alice Klein, Keri Brent, Nathan Brannon, Doug Burkhalter, Gloria Walling

Call to Order and Agenda Review: Julie Brannon, Chair

Meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. All parties on the call introduced themselves for the record. Meredith and Yvonne reviewed Zoom protocols for asking questions and accessible commands. Meredith reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Approval of December 2021 Minutes:

Marci moved and Corey seconded to accept the December 2021 SRC Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

Acting Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

Thank you to everyone for taking time to attend this meeting and showing support for the agency. Acknowledged stressful times continue and encouraged all to take care of their mental health and find ways to destress. Michael looked at the Vancouver area for the Tribal land acknowledgement today. It was an area of confluence and coming together of a number of Native Tribes to trade and share for the common good. It inspired Michael to think of how this group is coming together from disparate areas for the common good, and in that spirit he wants to honor those Tribal peoples.

Michael reviewed several laws that have passed (or appear to be passing) in the current Legislative session that just ended yesterday. Senate Bill 5763 for eliminating sub-prevailing wage certificates for individuals with disabilities is being signed today. House Bill 1852 for added accessibility to prescription drug labels, not sure this one passed but Michael wanted to say thank you for the work the disability community put towards getting language added to this bill that acknowledged people with print disabilities.

Senate Bill 5790, led by Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), is intended to help expand the "School to Work" program which helps transition students with intellectual and developmental disabilities into work experience. It's had success in some counties already and this expands it to all counties in the state. DSB is mentioned in the bill as a partner in this effort, Michael said DSB is not going to lead the effort but likely has participants who can benefit from the work experience opportunities. It also ties us closer to transition coalitions and interagency coalitions and he's happy about that aspect.

House Bill 1723 is the Digital Equity Act, and this bill seeks to increase the accessibility and affordability of digital access and technology to all state residents. DSHS and the Office of Equity are mandated with making a plan on how to roll that out by Dec 2023. The Office of Equity is holding listening sessions on March 29 & 30 and May 10 & 11 to find out where the gaps are that need coverage.

The Office of Equity, which is fairly new, has a five-year strategic plan for Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism rolling out to all agencies March 21st. Every state agency has to have a plan and report out where they are currently and where there are gaps. The reports will be due every October and this year will create the baseline. DSB's new staff member, Nohemy Solorzano-Thompson, HR Liaison and DEI Program Manager, will be leading the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training at the agency and how to implement it into our daily work.

DSB held a Spring Community Forum on March 2nd. May change the format slightly going forward. There was high interest in Youth Services, self-employment, and business relations aspects. Michael appreciates the community members who have attended these meetings.

Holding an agency All Staff meeting on April 28th, SRC members are welcome to join. Michael will talk about the RSA monitoring taking place this month, and future direction for the agency.

The IL program is going well, applications are up. The device loaning program has been very successful, and kudos to Kim Canaan for having the idea and then implementing it. Grateful for the participation of the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL) in shipping handheld devices out using their existing process. Michael noted that the SILC has asked for comments on their next three-year plan that needs to be written. For DSB it will be important to retain our Part B money in the new plan. We did lose a bit of funding in the last plan for Part B. These monies are for helping folks under 55 who are blind or visually impaired and do not have a vocational goal but need assistance with the daily skills for living. It's a very small but important pool of money that

keeps this program funded, and we want to maintain that. He added that sometimes folks served by IL discover that they do have abilities and could work again so they apply for VR services.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) monitoring is taking place in March and started on the 7th. DSB gathered and sent 309 documents to RSA for pre-review. The remote monitoring will take all of March, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning for two hours; today RSA is meeting with line staff only. The last monitor was in 2013 and there've been many changes since then. It's not intended to be a gotcha but an opportunity to look for areas that need improvement and where we can use Technical Assistance from RSA. So far Michael feels the conversations have gone well and we've have been able to show how DSB's policies and procedures line up with the Federal performance targets, and that we have reviews in place to validate the data being reported.

Jen commented that she has appreciated being included in the monitor meetings, agrees that it has been going well, and feels that she is learning a lot about DSB. She confirmed it has been a collaborative process so far without a lot of "gotchas", and has heard from other states this might not always be the case.

Michael said through the monitoring and prepping for the monitoring it is clear some changes are needed; employment outcomes have been good outcomes as far as stable jobs but very low in numbers for rehab status at exit. Trying to understand all of the reasons for this, some can be attributed to Order of Selection (OOS) with service delays and some to the pandemic when services went virtual. DSB needs to understand why people are exiting before reaching employment, and really work towards increasing the number of participants who stay in service and exit with competitive stable employment. Michael said he anticipates Carl Peterson will be helping with some of that work, as the Council will hear from Carl directly later in the meeting.

VR applications have gone up over the last month, Michael thinks people are feeling more confident and safer with the recent relaxing of the covid masking mandate.

Another focus is doing outreach and building community relationships again, post-pandemic. Lisa is working on a survey to participants. She will share it with the SRC when completed, and the council can review and contribute another one or two questions to the survey if desired. The survey will include people who have exited and those still in service. We want to know more about why people choose to leave without employment.

Gloria Walling asked for clarification on the acronym RSA, she's pretty sure it's not the Randolph-Sheppard Act. Michael explained it is the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP) – Super excited to report that DSB's budget ask for the program has made it to all three budgets (governor, house, senate) and looks likely to happen. Michael is proud of the team who made rapid responses to questions from the Legislature, and thanks to anyone who may have talked to their senator about what BEP is and the importance of updating the program to keep it going. The funds will be used to refresh all existing facilities, look at the

best ways to provide services, and expand the services through things like micro markets and food trucks. This model will allow for smaller operations and ability to go into more areas into the future after the current operations have been upgraded. The exciting aspect of this plan is it allows for a profitable business model with fewer customers. Too few customers has always been the reason given for no BEP sites in Eastern WA. The big challenge now is implementing this over the next five years, which Michael feels is a preferable dilemma to have than trying to work with an unsustainable program model.

Orientation Training Center (OTC) – Coming back with the intensive one-week workshops they were offering before the pandemic. DSB has data and can show that VR participants attending these workshops have then successfully found employment. The workshops allow time for focused instruction on the specific skills needed to move that person forward with their employment plan.

OTC instruction has been back in person since November 1st, with one residential student in each apartment for a total of six. Planning to extend to two students in each apartment in the near future, probably after the intensive workshops have taken place.

Youth Services (YS) – Enjoying the success of the youth newsletter, [the DSB Buzz](#), a recent financial literacy workshop, and Good Vibe Fridays. Some great news, the summer YS programs will be in person! Michael said all are cautiously optimistic that they will proceed as planned because the in-person peer-to-peer experience of these programs is critical for the youth participants; however, the students' safety is still paramount during this transitional time in the pandemic. Some youth participants have created a five-minute video about YS services with Jack Straw. It's near completion and will be on the DSB website soon. Also have added a video about the [2018 YES program](#).

Michael said there have been 14 staff positions filled just since November. Many of these openings have been due to retirements and there will be a couple more this year. It creates new opportunities for DSB with new people and new directions, and there is a lot of excitement. It is also a lot of change and staff are experiencing change fatigue. In the past two years, 78% of the people in leadership roles have changed and 60% of the counselors have changed. We've been focusing on capturing knowledge transfer and revising policies and procedures to accurately capture how things are done at DSB. HR has revamped the New Employee Orientation (NEO) training to include a full day on blind acculturation, awareness, and accessibility, and has given the required training to all current employees as well. The training has been well-received and has gotten excellent feedback.

DSB is looking to identify and share the agency's core values with all staff. These include integrated teaming, direct communications, client-centered services, rapid response, and building relationships. With new people, these may alter and change slightly over time, but remain at DSB's core of who we are as a service-providing agency. We also want to identify where there are gaps, and where does this new dynamism take us.

Currently have two Youth Services Specialist (YSS) positions open, in Spokane and Vancouver. They are somewhat unique positions as they are not really Rehab Teacher positions, and they are not really Human Services positions. They are more aligned with Business Relations and youth, and understanding how to connect youth to career experiences and businesses. So they have to understand all of these aspects, enjoy working with youth, and also have high initiative. The SRC-B is encouraged to spread the word about these openings. The YSS in Yakima did not hear about the position from a job posting, they heard about it from someone who heard about it.

Michael would like feedback on the Quarterly Report. Is it read? Not read? Is it useful? Is there more the council would like to see? Less? Michael thinks it gives a good snapshot of what's happening at the agency, and he'd love to hear feedback.

Marci commented that because there are just the two blind consumer groups, compared to the general VR agency, she'd like to be sure education about WCB and NFBW are part of NEO training.

Gloria Walling commented that when she was on the SRCB that she had concerns about DSB's and the Council's understanding of BEP. She appreciates that there now seems to be a new and better understanding of BEP and the vendors.

Michael thanked Gloria for her feedback, and said he honors the risk that BEP operators are willing to take to be entrepreneurs, especially now after two years with no business.

Meet New Business Engagement and Workforce Program Manager: Carl Peterson

Carl was introduced to the Council and went over his background. He started out in music, and then decided to go into social services. He became a job coach and worked at Community Resource Providers (CRPs) as a job coach and job developer helping people get into a career. He got a master's in public admin, and next worked with people who were homeless, immigrants, and refugees. His last position before starting at DSB last October was with the Work Source of Pierce County where he did outreach to businesses. His philosophy on business engagement is the more that activities takes place in-person with our participants the better. He also has a deep understanding of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

In his five months at DSB there have been the following business engagement transformations:

- Created two classes with the OTC that are led by recruiters on how to apply for work at the State of Washington, intended for counselors and participants.
- Big proponent of apprenticeships, both traditional and non-traditional, and is currently working with L & I and ANEW (Apprenticeships & Non-traditional Employment for Women) to share what apprenticeships are all about with staff and participants.
- Department of the Navy reached out, and they are specifically looking to hire more people who are blind or have low vision. Planning to present on how to create a specific "Federal" jobs resume, and how to look for and apply for Federal jobs.

- Working on plan to present a workshop on Financial Literacy at the OTC. While at WorkSource he worked with Harborstone Credit Union on this kind of class, and they would also recruit and hire if they saw a good candidate taking the workshop. He's looking for a local finance institution with which to create a similar kind of relationship.
- Working with Youth Services team to increase business engagement there as well. JBLM WorkSource professional taught a class on time management skills, and it went over really well. They have another employer already scheduled for another class.

Carl is meeting with CVS soon to see what they can offer. He's been doing business engagement foundational training with the counselors. Every month there is a 1.5-hour meeting with community resources. Getting a peek at the future with virtual WorkSource services. Training on work-from-home jobs being presented by Washington State University (WSU) along with the Washington Association of Businesses, especially relevant for rural areas. Have had good attendance and engagement with all offerings so far.

Current initiative is ISTEM, a computer training program which focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Offering a computer training program with a trainer from Microsoft on how to code. More advanced class will be held in five weeks for participants who show skill already in this area. Carl is already working with several tech companies to line up interviews for positions that will utilize these skills.

Lastly, Carl has looked at the self-employment model and made some adjustments such as changing the format, streamlining the process, and focusing on the individual skills needed to be successful. Working with the counselors to know who's looking to start their own business or work freelance so we can connect them with vendors in that field already.

Julie commented that she's impressed and pleased with the amount of training and engagement already taking place. She suggested the possibility of gathering a group of current or former employees who are blind or VI to provide feedback to businesses about their experiences.

Linda commented that she's thrilled about what Carl is bringing to DSB, especially bringing employers to DSB in person and exploring business engagement from many different angles.

SRC Tribal Rep: Christopher Zilar

Christopher introduced himself as the non-Native Program Director for the Spokane Tribe VR Program (TVR), he's been with the program a little over five years and he loves his job. Some of the differences between TVR and VR, they are funded to have five staff including him, three VR counselors, and one Consumer Service Representative who is similar to an Intake Specialist or Admin Assistant. They all wear many hats, and everyone does everything; e.g. Christopher has a caseload, is responsible for updating policies, and is on a number of boards and committees. He said this is pretty typical for a TVR counselor as there is not enough money to hire contractors.

They have to reapply for a Federal grant every five years, they're in their second grant cycle so still considered a new program. They serve about 60 people, average 10-15 rehab exits per year. To apply for services participants must live in the service area which has been designed to emulate ancient tribal land areas. This area includes five counties in WA, plus Kootenai County in Northern Idaho. Participants have to be enrolled in a recognized tribe, but it does not have to be the Spokane tribe. There are overlaps with several TVR programs and cases can be shared between them. There is the same requirement for eligibility as VR as far as having a disability and participants have no job or are looking to improve on current job.

One difference with TVR is that with lower numbers they're able to have more 1:1 time with participants. Cultural values are very important for TVR, and "traditional" services are provided. That could look like helping a participant with beading supplies if that's an activity they use to calm their anxiety and stay away from substance abuse. The Spokane Tribe vision is to be a fully self-sufficient, sovereign tribe, and Christopher feels this is a good vision for the TVR program as well. Their goal is to help their participants become self-sufficient and that helps the Tribe achieve its vision as well. Spokane Tribal members speak the Salish language, and all employees are required to learn basic Salish within a year of being hired. Every tribe has their own traditions, and even practices like smudging and sweating may be done differently from tribe to tribe. There is a very strong sense of community and importance of family.

Christopher talked about the importance of remembering the traumas that the Native tribes have endured. The settlement of Spokane was established into a thriving city, by the non-Native dominant population, in only ten years. One of the biggest impacts to the Tribes was the addition of fish wheels at the head of the Columbia River, it meant no salmon were going upstream and a complete loss of that vital dietary resource to the Tribes along the Columbia and its tributaries. The dams on the Columbia were the proverbial nail in the coffin.

The Spokane Tribe was established by Executive Order rather than through a negotiated and signed treaty. This means that technically, although unlikely, the Tribe could also be disbanded by a President rescinding the Executive Order, so this leads to feelings of uncertainty when planning for the long-term future of the Tribe.

In 1978 Tribes were granted freedom of religion and could no longer be prosecuted for promoting Tribal beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies. The Spokane Tribe was established in 1881, and their constitution was written in 1951. There are two uranium mines on the reservation that made some money for the Tribe when they were mined by the Federal government at one point. But they were closed after local streams were contaminated by waste and people were getting cancer. Just recently the Feds have agreed to pay for waste cleanup.

Linda said she appreciated everything Christopher shared, and it was very interesting. It's always heartbreaking to hear of how the Native peoples have been treated, and also inspiring to hear about their beliefs, traditions, and accomplishments.

Sheila asked for clarification, and Christopher explained in more detail the difference between a Tribe that has been established by treaty as opposed to being established by Executive Order.

Jerri thanked Christopher for his presentation; and asked if TVR provides pre-employment transitional services for students still in school. He said yes, very similar to how the state provides it but without the restrictions from WIOA. TVR serves students 16 and older, and if they're in high school or working towards a GED then the agency will treat them much like an adult in VR and add an employment goal to their plan. Then they will focus on services that support the student's goal. Sometimes their role is to advocate for the student by attending IEP meetings or helping the school understand and consider the student's cultural background. Jerri offered to add information about TVR services on the PAVE website and will follow up with Christopher.

Marci said that Jerri already asked her questions! She would also like to help spread the word between the consumer groups and TVR so will follow up with Christopher.

By-laws Discussion & Proposed Changes: Steve Fiksdal

Based on the discussion that arose during the SRC-B election process last year, a committee was formed to not only update the election process but to review the By-laws for any other changes needed at this time. Steve went over the proposed changes to the SRC-B By-laws.

- Under Membership: there has been confusion about how the term dates are determined. The state looks at seats (positions) on the Council and the term dates are attached to that seat, not the actual date when the member is appointed. In this way, someone can serve a partial term and then two full terms as defined in the RCW (Revised Code of Washington). The By-laws now refer to the RCW to explain the Council make-up and how seats are appointed rather than having it all listed in the By-laws.
- Under Executive Committee Duties: deleted sentence about overseeing and evaluating the performance of the SRCB staff. They are DSB employees, and the Committee does not supervise them. Added sentence about being responsible for drafting the SRCB Annual Report instead of having it under the Policy Committee.
- Under Membership Committee: deleted sentence making this Committee responsible for the annual election and added a simplified Election Process to the By-Laws instead.
- Under Satisfaction Committee (now Program & Evaluation Committee): removed responsibility for SRCB Annual Report.
- Article 4: Added a clear and simple annual election process for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions.
- Under Member Duties: added language about following the Code of Ethics, set meeting attendance expectation, add requirement for each member to sit on a committee, and added that meetings will follow Roberts Rules of Order.

Jen offered thanks to Steve and the sub-committee members who worked to clarify and simplify the election process as well as other By-law additions. Committee members involved were Steve, Christopher, Andy, Kristen, and Corey.

Marci moved to adopt the proposed changes to the By-laws and Jen seconded the motion. Motion passed. Yvonne will send LaDell the newest version to post to the SRC-B page on the DSB website.

Executive Committee Report: Julie Brannon

Julie advised that the Executive Committee meets monthly. In December they spearheaded providing SRCB input to the DSB State Plan, and Julie wrote a letter for the SRCB Annual Report. In February they met with the Boards and Commissions Coordinator, Stefan Petrovic, to discuss staggering the Council position expiration dates. At the March meeting they reviewed the proposed By-law changes. The SRCB Executive Committee members were asked to have a presence at the RSA monitoring sessions, and Meredith worked out a schedule for those able to attend. Then she and Linda will meet directly with RSA next week.

Membership Committee Report: Linda Wilder

Linda thanked the Committee members for their ongoing work on membership. There are five Council members who have completed their full terms and will be leaving the Council in September and November this year. The Committee will need to work on filling those seats, so if any current members know anyone who's interested in joining the Council send them her way. Openings are for: representative of business, labor, and industry; representative of a disability advocacy group representing individuals who are blind; current or former applicants for, or recipients of, vocational rehabilitation services; representative of an individual who is blind and has multiple disabilities, and has difficulty in representing himself or herself or is unable due to disabilities to represent himself or herself; and representative of the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

Linda said she has heard from Stefan Petrovic that he has a plan for staggering terms so there are fewer terms expiring at the same time. Linda will contact a number of members who will need to reapply for their position to affect this date change, and she apologized in advance for the need and knows it is a pain.

Jacob commented that it would be helpful to have information to share about what it means to serve on the Council or maybe have a Council member mentor a potential applicant. He's heard from people that it's a bit intimidating when they look at the Boards and Commissions information and read that it's a gubernatorial appointment. What does it mean to serve at the will of the Governor? What are the expectations of members, timewise and other? Linda said this is the function of the Membership Committee so he can feel free to connect potential Council members

with Linda to answer their questions. She added that Stefan has offered to help with the application process if anyone has any trouble with it.

Program and Evaluation Committee Report: Jen Bean

Jen said the Committee would like to make changes to the current customer survey to hear from a broader base of customers. She and Doug are working on a new survey and once in draft form they will send on to the Executive Committee. She also wants to see and analyze trends in the data more easily than they can with the current format of the survey report. Jen's also very interested in meeting with DSB's new DEI Program Manager, Nohemy Solorzano-Thompson.

Jen presented the results of the last survey in the format that she thinks is more helpful and looking for feedback also. There were six responses received for closures October-December 2021. Half of the participants answered very satisfied to all of the questions, and the majority of participants who answered were satisfied. 78% satisfied with how staff treated them, 72% satisfied with the services they received, 83% satisfied with how they received information and overall that was 72%. Jen reminded everyone to keep in mind that she is not a statistician, and the response pool is small. The top trends from the comments were around appreciation for the technology provided, especially when services were remote; and around customer service both positive and negative. She shared a couple of specific participant comments. Jen then asked for feedback on these results and what else people want to see in the survey.

Julie asked if six is a normal number for survey responses, seems a little low. Jen said she didn't go back to look at previous quarters responses, but agreed it seems low.

Michael reminded everyone this is an exit survey and only sent to participants who have exited the program, either with or without employment. This does not include active participants; and six to eight responses per quarter is not atypical, Yvonne confirmed.

Linda said that one of the participant comments that Jen shared seems like it might be a training issue for the counselor unless eligibility rules has changed since she was a counselor. Michael said no, they are the same; and he agrees this is likely a training issue. Specifically about the participant knowing how to appeal an eligibility decision. Also, a reminder that the NFB Newline has all of the DSB information available so if someone cannot read Braille or Large Print there is a way for them to access the information there as well.

Jacob asked if DSB has a process for following up with a participant when this kind of feedback is received. Yvonne said that because the survey is sent via email, she can look up who sent a specific reply. In this instance the participant also sent a direct email to the address on the survey and Yvonne forwarded that email to the counselor's manager.

Christopher commented that TVR is required to do an annual review of closed cases to see if the person could benefit from services now. Are DSB and/or DVR required to do this also? Michael said DSB does review those cases determined to not benefit from VR from being too severely

disabled. Those are followed up after a year to see if anything has changed and they would benefit from services now.

Jerri commented – what about adding a question if their rights were explained to them, and they actually understand them; and about how services were impacted by Covid.

Michael noted that the agency does send out additional surveys to participants. Results from one done in 2021 that addressed the pandemic and remote services are available on the DSB website, [2021 DSB remote services survey results](#). Youth Services has also made use of surveys to inform which workshop topics to offer remotely, when to offer them, and what technology was needed for youth to participate.

Public Comment

No public comments offered.

Wrap-Up

Sheila Turner mentioned that Edith Bishel Center is likely closing on June 30th. Sheila no longer works there and is in the process of becoming an IL vendor for the Tri-Cities area. Sheila can be reached at her new email LegacyILServices@gmail.com.

Jacob wanted to add a comment about BEP, in addition to the budget ask that Michael mentioned. It's still tough times for many operators right now. Costs of goods and wages keep going up and he's not sure some of the smaller operators will be able to make it.

SRC 2022 Meeting Schedule

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

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

Meeting Adjourned

Corey made a motion to adjourn, and Linda seconded. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 11:54 PM.