

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

June 9, 2023

Seattle, Washington

Attendance – all members attended via videoconference

Council Members Present:

Andy Arvidson, Cathy Wilson, Chris Alejano, Jacob Kamaunu, Jen Bean, Julie Brannon, Julie Harlow, Kris Colcock, Kristin Geary, Larry Watkinson, Linda Wilder, Michael MacKillop, Bek Moras, Sara Logston

Council Members Absent:

Christopher Zilar, Jill McCormick, Sean McCormick

Staff and Visitors Present:

Meredith Stannard, Yvonne Verbraak, Tricia Eyerly, Joe Kasperski, Lisa Wheeler, Kim Canaan, Sophie Watson, Rebecca Rodriguez, Sheri Richardson, Jolie Ramsey, Jen Chong (PAVE), Alco Canfield, Doug Burkhalter

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. Julie reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

Review dates for the 2023 SRCB meetings

September 15, and December 8. All scheduled for 9am-12pm via Zoom.

Approval of December 2022 Minutes

Linda moved and Andy seconded to accept the March 2023 SRCB Meeting Minutes. Motion passed.

SRCB Business

Julie covered several points of Council business that included the following:

- Reminded all Council members of importance of attending quarterly council meetings and any committee meetings that are scheduled. Need to let her/current Chairperson know whenever a member will not make it to a scheduled meeting.
- Input for the State Plan from the Council will be completed by the Executive Committee. Julie is planning several meetings to discuss items and have their completed narrative submitted to Michael by September.
- Asked for interest in having an in-person meeting again? Based on feedback there is a desire to meet at least once a year in person. Linda would like to be in-person in September for her last meeting as a council member, but it was decided that was too short of notice to figure out all the logistics.
- The Executive Committee has been discussing an onboarding process for new Council members, in addition to having training which has been very successful so far. Talked about assigning an existing member as a mentor, available for questions and guidance.

Executive Director's Report: Michael MacKillop

Michael shared that he was able to attend a showing of the audio play *Flying Blind!* recently, which is a collection of stories from people with a range of visual disabilities. Some of the stories are from students at the OTC, and one of the current Council members, Jacob Kamaunu, is included in it. The recorded audio version can be found here: [Flying Blind!](#)

He acknowledged that Linda Wilder's time on the Council is ending soon, with the September quarterly meeting. When Michael first started at DSB as an Adaptive Technology Specialist, he worked as part of the team that Linda was on, and he feels fortunate to have had her show him by example what a good counselor is, and how she worked to stay connected to her caseload. When the agency discusses improving customer engagement, Michael said he often thinks of the Linda Wilder model of counseling. He also sees it in her recent role with the Council as Vice Chair and leading the Membership Committee, and thanks her for that commitment.

Larry – Shared that both he and his wife had worked with Linda as their counselor and experienced first-hand how she treated people with kindness and respect, as well as helping them see a positive future for themselves.

Julie H – She recalls sharing stories with other DSB participants in Pierce County, and sometimes people would listen and then say, "Why isn't my counselor more supportive like Linda?". She was the model counselor and Julie is glad to hear that's what is in mind for the future in regard to participant engagement.

Jacob – He started with DSB in the Seattle office, then moved to Tacoma and his case was transferred to Linda. He appreciated that she completely supported him in his employment goal, and said he wouldn't be where he is today without her support and counseling.

Michael thanked everyone for their feedback. He wants to talk about a number of things today, including feedback received from a recent Town Hall meeting; final Rehabilitation Services

Administration (RSA) report received from the April-May 2022 monitoring sessions; changes in the industry, and looking at every other VR organization and their processes.

DSB held the Spring Town Hall virtual meeting a couple of weeks ago, and Michael appreciated that people were willing to be inside on Zoom on what was a beautiful evening. The questions he posed to the community were about how DSB can improve the customer experience, and how to keep customers engaged. A number of ideas were shared including getting the participant connected to the blind/low vision community such as the consumer groups as early as possible, and connecting them with a mentor or someone already working in the same job goal. This has been heard several times, and that it's especially important for folks who are new to vision loss. A website was shared for the Blind Professional Network, blindpronet.org, as a resource for peer to peer business connections.

Another discussion topic was around the need for more frequent contact with participants, once a quarter as required is not enough, the more meaningful contact there is between participant and counselor generally leads to more successful outcomes. Michael knows that DSB believes that, and most counselors believe that; however, WIOA increased the administrative burden on counselors at least tenfold when it became law and some of that meaningful contact focus was shifted to documenting data. DSB is looking at ways to shift some of the data requirements away from the counselors to free up their time for more frequent and meaningful contact with their caseload.

Michael said other comments heard were about the need to improve DSB's ability to connect participants to jobs. DSB is good at adaptive skills, blindness rehabilitation, and believing in someone's vocational goal to get the right training. The shortfall is in getting participants connected to all of the opportunities that are out there. Michael said there was one comment made at the Town Hall about why do all of DSB's services have to be about employment? Why can't participants receive training in the skills they need without having to look for a job? And that is a challenge because a vocational rehabilitation agency is all about employment. It is mandated that to get VR services a participant has to commit to employment as the end goal, and this can be confusing for people.

DSB has the Independent Living program that is more appropriate for people who aren't looking to work, but who need to learn adaptive skills of blindness or need assistance with orientation, technology, and home management. There are other options as well in the community that people can get connected to, particularly the consumer organizations that offer a lot of trainings and classes. It can be a challenge in doing outreach to align the mission of vocational rehabilitation and what people are seeking for vocational rehabilitation, and Michael thinks DSB is doing a good job marketing that it's about employment and has to be about employment.

It's understood that employment is not the end goal for some, and they still need skills. That's where the Independent Living program needs to be more robust. DSB's federal partners see us as really strong in rehab and really weak in connecting people to jobs. This is what causes frustration for Michael when he hears comments about why does it have to be about employment, people need the services, stop forcing them to work, etc. But that is what this program is about. He told the Council members that when they are providing input to the agency this is the piece the agency

is struggling with. How does DSB align that vocational message, so everyone is clear about what they are getting into? And that they agree to focus on that as well. It's known that this isn't the case due to the high number of participants who apply for and receive services, but exit without employment. It is too large of a number and the federal partners will penalize DSB if we are not meeting the expected rates and ratios of participants exiting with employment versus exiting without employment. Currently DSB is at a backwards rate of exits with employment at 30% or in the 30s, and it needs to be flipped to 70% or higher of participants who exit with employment or retain their current job. Part of that is making sure that DSB makes it clear that's who we are and what we need to be doing.

Michael said there's the possibility of re-branding as well. Vermont has taken the words vocational and rehabilitation out of their program and now call themselves [HireAbility Vermont](#). It is clear when you go to their webpage what they are about. They're about the ability to get hired. Is that something DSB needs to be thinking about for the program? He asked the Council members to look at it, think about it, talk about it, and give feedback on their perspective on it. It's a critical piece right now and seeking some guidance on how best to do the outreach and make sure the message is clear. Michael appreciates getting the feedback that this needs attention, he hears it in the customer satisfaction survey, he heard it at the Town Hall, and it's important for him to hear it. He said this feedback also aligns with the monitoring report from RSA.

The other big focus during the monitoring was on DSB providing pre-employment transition services to youth under 14 years old, and that they didn't think it was allowed. The report says the issue is that DSB and DVR are not aligned on the definition of "early as necessary" in providing these services. While the definition of transition services from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) says "age 16 or as early as necessary", it is specified in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) for DVR as age 14. The federal partners noted this discrepancy, and advised that these services are not agency-specific but state-specific and have to be in agreement. DSB reacted to this last year and changed the minimum age for pre-employment transition services to 14, and Michael said that has been a loss to not be able to serve the younger students through our pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) program.

DSB is looking at this adjustment and building a stronger pre-ETS program that aligns with the age 14 and older requirement. Michael knows that DVR will not serve younger than 14 even though they also had stated "early as necessary" in their State plan. Their actions and definition in the WAC belied that statement, so DSB will need to connect to that minimum age. This was a huge finding for DSB, and there is some frustration that only DSB received a finding for this discrepancy, even though it was explained this needed to align state-wide.

Another issue in pre-employment transition services was that DSB paid for a class taken by participants in the BRIDGE program at Eastern Washington University. This is the program offered to students going into Higher Ed that provides a lot of training on accessibility and self-advocacy. Because the class that was offered and taken was not tied to a job goal, RSA determined it should not have been paid for using pre-ETS money. DSB needs to figure out exactly how much was spent and negotiate the payback for that.

Michael wanted to ensure he's making it clear that the rules for spending the 15% set aside for pre-ETS are highly complex, highly regulated, and RSA has understood it as there are many things you cannot do with those funds. He understands that this is partly done as a protection; there are states who don't want to serve pre-ETS at all, and the law is saying it all has to go to direct services. No administrative support, no transportation, etc. so that the 15% is not put somewhere else and spent on anything besides pre-ETS. However they've made it so convoluted that it makes it hard to have a full program of what the students need for career exploration if that is what it is intended for. Michael stressed this is his opinion, obviously, and others may agree or feel differently.

Michael acknowledged that many people, including a number of Council members, sat in on the month-long monitoring and he is grateful to those who did.

There are some findings on the fiscal side that are a little bit frustrating. The federal partners looked at state site audits from 2018 and 2019 that found issues which have since been resolved. But they put them together with their monitoring and built a case that there is work needed on improving the policy process and internal controls. The internal controls are how DSB knows that policy and procedure are being followed in the fiscal processes. A lot of the finding seemed to point to these old audits issues that were resolved.

There was a new issue around the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) that had not been caught. DSB had received extra monies for the new case management system in 2017, this impacted the MOE that was required the next year and DSB received a penalty for not meeting it. The penalty issue was resolved, but it seemed to point out to RSA that fiscal processes are not as strong as they need to be. There was a four dollar issue of program revenue that got moved over into a different fiscal year which created a period of performance issue. It was only four dollars, but they felt it could have been \$4 million and there should be an internal control to catch it, even on what's considered an insignificant amount. That means there are findings and DSB will need to revise the policies, procedures, and controls around all of the fiscal processes. There is also an issue around a rate setting policy that most agencies have in place that is being put together now.

Lastly, in regard to the monitoring, there are a lot of recommendations made that were not findings. Things that have to be done as well as things to consider, and Michael appreciated some of that. These included the following:

- Promote an internal culture of focus on employment. DSB does great on the rehab side of getting people skilled at living independently in their communities, but not so great on the vocational side of connecting them to jobs.
- Make stronger Workforce collaborations with both state and local Workforce Development Centers.
- Focus on services that lead to employment.
- Increase focus on quality assurance.
- Improve fiscal forecasting for pre-employment transition services, Order of Selection, and the OTC.

- Increase the data literacy of staff so they better understand the federal performance measures, and where there are gaps and/or how we are achieving them.
- Conduct analysis of the OTC to determine the best use of the program versus expenditure. Michael understands this to mean, how are we folding employment and job readiness into the OTC experience in a better way?

Michael stopped here, and asked if there were any questions. That was a lot of information.

Kristin – Said that coincidentally she is in her second term contracting for job readiness skills at the OTC. Michael said DSB loves having her there and the training being provided. He said that’s the thing with this type of feedback, it’s not that good things are not already happening. It’s that there’s a need to improve it, to do more of it, and get better at it.

Julie B – Said that career training was her passion. She thinks what needs to happen is a mindset in staff. Developing a constant mindset that everything that they do is geared toward independent living skills as well as employment. She is also very excited to hear the research into why people are leaving without jobs, curious if they become participants even if not really planning to work.

Alco – Wondered if there was a way for Flying Blind! to be posted on YouTube for broader access? Michael said they can talk to Sherri R. offline and see what options are available. (Note: There is a link included to the audio play on Vimeo at the beginning of Michael’s report on page 2.)

Kris C – Said she’d been able to attend the North Region’s preferred provider training. They invited them to come in and talk about what are the skills that are needed. It was a great opportunity not only for networking, but to see how they are presenting the information and to give people a chance. She thinks if all regions can do that it really helps increase understanding.

LaDell – Asked if the RSA findings were impacted by the decision that working at Lighthouse (for the Blind) doesn’t count towards what they consider as an employment outcome? Michael said he does not believe it does. He thinks they were basing their information on interviews with staff, looking at our materials, and looking at our website. He thinks we emphasize the rehab and adaptive skills side of things and the messaging on employment was not as strong as it needs to be. Whether that is through marketing or conversations with the participant early on in the process. Also, will be going to talk a bit about the business relations side of things in thinking of business as a customer, and the Workforce partners that have connection to all sorts of opportunities that connect people to jobs and careers. There are a lot of different levels.

Larry – Asked about job development opportunities, and does DSB do outreach to businesses about what infrastructure is needed to support employment of folks who are blind or low vision. Is DSB able to work with specific software programs to determine accessibility? Michael replied yes, there are many aspects to this type of support. When a DSB participant receives a job offer, both an Adaptive Technology (AT) Specialist and a Vision Rehab Specialist (VRS) are available to do the assessment of that workplace for suggestions on lighting and flow, as well as the accessibility of the tools and applications that will be used there. Sometimes there is negotiation on fixes or workarounds that can make it workable; and sometimes the essential functions of the job are just not fixable, and that job may not be possible which is super frustrating. This is on the individual side of getting a job and working through the issues. For businesses, DSB does provide technical

assistant and some level of assessment or connecting them to resources who can provide that thorough assessment. There is a lot of work in that and DSB is not always comfortable assessing all of a business's materials, products, and tools. Don't want to give a green light and then find there's a whole subsection that's highly inaccessible that were missed. But often connecting them up to providers that do that work and can test accessibility of their website, applications, etc.

DSB staff just can't provide all of that for the state enterprise. Sometimes DSB is asked to review all of an agency's website, or materials, or applications, and that's just too much. Have been advocating for the Washington Chief Information Officer's (CIO) office to develop support for the enterprise in terms of accessibility of forms used on state websites and applications. Also looking to make stronger policies on procurement of systems so that accessibility is the top priority, and the vendor is on the hook if accessibility is broken or isn't really there despite their claims.

Larry said he is strongly in partnership with Michael and Mary Craig, and appreciates the excellent advocacy and support of these efforts.

Julie H – Commented that she had the pleasure of attending the OTC and then she went to Helen Keller, and she thinks they do a little better job on the vocational side. They had a training department where they just focused on the job. They would give participants help with their resumes and the job search. They would send people out to work one day a week, and that really helped build confidence with younger students who had no experience. Her teacher was instrumental in helping her find people for informational interviews, finding a local business that let her teach a class, and helping her build a curriculum. That was one aspect of going to Helen Keller that she thinks is phenomenal and she would love to see some model of that at DSB.

Julie B – Commented that while she was not at the OTC when Julie H attended, they used to do non-paid internships when she was working there. She estimated they did about 60 internships during her tenure.

Alco – Said that she has always wondered why DSB doesn't offer more internal job development. It seems like new counselors have sent participants to jobs where they don't know anything either and it's a bad combination. This is within the agency, not just business relations person, but somebody who goes out and develops networks like it used to be done. She feels this is really important.

Kristin – Wanted to add that internships are back up and running at the OTC. She is spearheading them along with Alice Klein and a couple of other people. She's happy it's a topic of conversation.

Michael said DSB values that as well, that employer experience, and loved hearing that connection at Helen Keller is being made. In regard to job development, will be talking a little bit about business relations and plans to provide some of that. Not necessarily in the traditional job developer role but to get the internal support for sure.

Jacob – Frustrated by a participant he know who knows that he is on the Council, and they feel that the Council does nothing. He believes they are working with a counselor, she told Jacob that she went to a job and then sat at a desk with nothing to do until she was let go. So her complaint is

that she is not getting enough assistance from her counselor to complete the transition into a new job. Jacob is frustrated that he doesn't have an answer for her and wanted to share the feedback.

Michael confirmed that when a participant gets a job, DSB continues to work with them to make sure the job is stable. This can include specific interventions such as bringing in the rehab specialist to do training or education awareness with coworkers or supervisor. There can be a lot of services provided by DSB to bridge any gaps that are identified once they're in the new job. They need to talk to their counselor about this support. He asked Lisa if she had anything to add to his response.

Lisa appreciated Jacob bringing this up. Always want to hear about an experience to understand this individual situation, and certainly believes there's room for improvement when it comes to creating a program that would meet the needs of those participants. DSB is trying to do things in a variety of different places. And she thinks it's been recognized that having some internal infrastructure around that at the agency would be helpful.

Michael said he appreciates the conversation as it stimulates thinking. Some of the additional changes being looked at may have been shared before. Have negotiated with DVR for DSB to get a larger split of the VR grant awarded to the state. DSB will now be getting 18% of the grant which equates to \$1.2 million more each year starting October 1, 2023. He is happy and proud of the work done to help DVR see that the increase made sense. They are strong partners with DSB and Michael appreciates that.

What this change allows DSB to do is add a number of new positions. With the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), business has been a customer same as the individual job seeker who has a visual disability. The thought behind that is trying to resolve that employment question from two directions. To help that employer be more open and have a workplace that is more disability friendly, and ready to create a sense of belonging for the individual. Providing technical assistance to the business around that. But also understanding business language, what are the characteristics and the skills that businesses need, and then ensuring those are built into the rehab program processes and training. There are opportunities, and businesses create training programs specific to high-paying jobs they can't fill. What opportunities are out there for participants to get the pre-apprenticeship, to get the targeted skills training or certified skills training, ready to get high-paying jobs that are just waiting for employees. As well as helping businesses understand what accessibility is and how to make the training or the job itself accessible.

DSB is looking to reorganize and create a split to really honor that dual customer, so there will be an Assistant Director for Workforce. Lisa will be taking on this position, and building the business connection to bring it back into the agency to help guide those job readiness skills. And then another Assistant Director that manages the participant services side of things. In making sure they have job readiness and the adaptive skills of blindness. Looking to expand Business Relations and add three Specialist positions, who will do some of that job development work that Alco talked about, and find the opportunities out there in the community to match up to DSB participants with those skills. They will be connected to those opportunities in better ways than is being done now. Also looking at those Specialists to be thinking about labor market analysis; what

jobs are out there and what is the training needed to start. Bringing up ideas of realistic jobs that are out there, that are high-paying, and that fit in with an individual's aptitudes and abilities. This will be critical to start these conversations and start thinking about jobs at an earlier stage; so it's not all about rehab, but thinking concretely about a career, what is available, and what do they need to do. Hopeful that this can address part of the misalignment around not understanding that employment is key. Michael asked Lisa if she wanted to add anything about this change.

Lisa said Michael described a lot of what they want to have happen. They want to build understanding into how their efforts, counseling, and guidance at the agency are connecting to the Workforce in very educated and targeted ways. Carl Peterson, who was hired as a Program Manager, has created a lot of content around this. He worked in the Workforce system before coming to DSB. He sees the necessity of understanding current workforce sector growth and connecting that to which Career Pathways are developed, and to participant coaching so they can make informed employment goals leading to jobs that are growing and competitive. That connection is what the Specialists will help create by having a group of people at the agency who can help counselors focus on that at the participant level.

Lisa said it's also working with employers and the Workforce system. DSB is a partner under WIOA and how do participants get co-enrolled to engage in some of the activities offered to partners that the agency, and most importantly, participants can benefit from. Things like training opportunities, work-based experiences, and getting connected to employers early on. There's much there that DSB hasn't been able to tap into due to lack of capacity, and the Business Relations Specialists will help do that. They can carry a small caseload and work directly with people who are ready to engage in those types of activities. It's exciting because DSB has not done the work in this way before. And it seems to be a successful model based on several other VR agencies that use this approach.

Michael listed some additional positions that will be added, including a Quality Assurance person, an internal trainer for business processes, and a trainer for the Business Enterprise Program that will include fundamentals for self-employment and all aspects of small business ownership. The Revision VR process has worked on reducing the time for referrals and proposed a new process that will launch next week. Realized that with so much going on that DSB needs a way to organize and manage all of the activities and changes, so are looking to hire a project management team along with organizational change management to prioritize all of the things that need to happen. They will be able to measure each change and judge success before we move on to the next thing. It can be frustrating as a small agency to not have ability to do that level of project management. He wants to easily give updates on what's been done, was it successful, what's coming next, etc.

Things are going well with two BEP locations in the construction phase. VR is steadily increasing applications and employment outcomes. Almost at triple digits with 99 employment outcomes for the year. It was the norm to have 150 to 175 employment outcomes per year prior to the pandemic so it's great to see that number going back up.

Kris C – Commented that she talked to somebody currently at the OTC, and they told her they were paired up with someone who'd been at the OTC for a couple of terms already. Their

feedback was that it's made all the difference to have somebody showing them the ropes. Kudos to DSB for adding that mentorship.

Michael thanked Kris for pointing out one of the incredible changes happening. When he talks about the need for change, it does not mean there are not phenomenal things already happening, because they are. He's just greedy and wants them happening everywhere and quicker.

Andy – When he was at the OTC many years ago, they created the informational interview process in the Braille class, and he was wondering if informational interviewing was still part of the OTC training?

Michael said he's pretty sure it is, and asked Kristin if she has more information about it. She said that yes, they are going to do informational interviews and she is actually meeting with students later today to make sure they have their interview questions written, and they are also preparing to attend a job fair.

Lisa added that DSB just provided an agency-wide "Train the Trainer" class for the Dependable Strengths training. Carl Peterson brought this in because his vision is to use the reports that are generated out of the process; participants can use their personal report to speak to an employer about it and why they'd be a good fit to work for them. Selling yourself is often the most difficult thing to do for all of us, and attending the job fair is a great way for participants to practice those skills.

Julie H – Commented that there has been a lot of chatter in the community about how much better the OTC and DSB are becoming. She wanted to express thanks for all of DSB's hard work on behalf of all the folks who are blind and low vision, and for what is still to come.

Jacob – Mentioned that he's involved with Beep Baseball in Tacoma, and they do a demonstration for the OTC once a year. The students come to the field and get trained on the game, and he's noticed how much the students and the trainers enjoy being outside and doing something physical. Michael said he appreciates Ron Jasmer's (OTC Manager) passion for getting the students out into the community. Even though physical fitness is not part of a vocational goal it is an important aspect of the journey.

Presentation: Lisa Wheeler, Assistant Director of VR and Workforce

Lisa talked about the intensive time she has spent on pre-employment transition services over the past year, much of it based on what was shared at the RSA monitoring prior to receiving the draft report. Have spent time developing procedures and internal controls that had not been very robust, and then training the pre-ETS staff. Need to be crystal clear about the definition of pre-employment transition services and what DSB can and cannot provide to students in pre-ETS.

Lisa has been working closely with Matthew Hines who was hired as the pre-ETS Manager after Deja Powell left. There are now pre-ETS staff in every DSB field office, except Lacey, which is really exciting as it gives DSB more ability to do intensive outreach and networking in the local areas and not just focus on statewide programs. Lots of opportunities to grow in Washington and to reach students who don't know about DSB yet. DSB has an agreement with the National Technical

Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) to provide training to Matt and to the team. There is so much regulation involved with requirements around budgets, contracts, procedures, and reporting; it really is a stand-alone VR program.

Summer programs for pre-ETS are kicking off shortly. The Bridge program will be two weeks this year with a little bit different format. Yakima had been an area without much connection to students due to focus on the urban population centers. DSB added a pre-ETS position to that office last year and added Jazmin Rials to the team. She recently hosted an event which 19 students attended, and the team is really excited to grow transition services throughout the state.

Lisa talked about business engagement next and shared that she and Carl Peterson have been talking to CVS Health about potentially building a career skills lab in the Seattle office. This would provide industry-based training for a variety of professions or even offer a work-based learning experience for students to gain retail customer service or pharmacy work. They have several models of these labs around the country. Nothing has been finalized yet, but having discussions about what would look like.

DSB has also been bringing in other organizations like Novacoast, which is a vendor that is now working with us. They are a cybersecurity training and placement provider, and they have had a lot of success working to train individuals in the industry sector. They are very interested in working with us, they have a contract now, and they are meeting with counselors and participants. Lisa said she and Carl are always looking at tools for labor market analysis. DSB wants to tap into what's happening regionally around Washington to see where some career pathways for DSB participants can be made in those specific industry sectors. It varies widely around Washington, and want to understand where those opportunities are aligned so training programs can be connected to those employment opportunities.

It was great to hear all the feedback today about the OTC, and Lisa agrees with it. She feels it is heading in a really exciting direction under Ron Jasmer's leadership. One of his goals was for students to spend more time in the community, and added "Life of Action" days to the OTC curriculum. They are generally focused on employment with visits to a WorkSource Center or a job fair. These excursions are critical for people to understand how to navigate these types of activities on their own after they've moved out of the center.

This past week, Lisa, Michael, and Joe hosted DSB's budget fiscal analyst, budget advisor, and the fiscal analyst for the House Appropriations Committee on a visit to the OTC. Lisa gave kudos to Jim Portillo who led the tour and discussion. It was fantastic to sit in and hear what the students were sharing in a seminar session. They received a thank you note from Brian Way, the analyst for the House Appropriations Committee, and how much he appreciated seeing the empowerment and positivity of the students. He is thankful that DSB is providing and offering these solutions because he could tell it was incredibly life-changing for the students.

Lastly, Lisa shared a couple of success stories that she has learned about recently. Had a great self-employment outcome for a participant who worked with VRC Ardell Burns in the Vancouver office. The participant is now a jeweler, under her business name of Serene Sloth. The last time Ardell checked in with her, she reported that her income had almost doubled and continues to grow. Out

of the Yakima office, VRC Juan Ortiz recently led a team effort to support a participant who works at the Department of Health. DSB helped him with mobility and assistive technology, and he's been able to retain his position as a radiation health physicist.

Julie B – Asked for clarification on what is being developed with CVS in Seattle office? Lisa said it is called a Career Skills Lab, and still in the fact finding and discussion phase. A number of things still to be determined include where to locate it in the Seattle office, creating curriculum for it, and deciding which DSB staff would support the curriculum. A new thing Lisa learned at the most recent meeting is that CVS Health is a corporation, and once you get into CVS there are career pathways growing out of that opportunity. For example, someone could start as a Pharmacy Assistant and then want to go on a different career pathway such as becoming an attorney or computer programmer, and CVS is very motivated to support their staff with career growth. Many opportunities outside of the pharmaceutical type retail position.

Executive Committee Report: Julie Brannon

Julie went over the upcoming elections process. Both she and Linda Wilder have reached their term limits so the Council will vote on a new Chair and Vice-Chair at the December quarterly meeting. Julie asked Council members to read the elections procedure in the SRC-B By-laws, so they understand the process. Also recommended that people look at the positions' responsibilities to make sure they have the bandwidth, ability, and time to fulfill them. Each person running will have time to speak before voting. If more than two people run per position there will be a vote off to get down to two candidates for the final vote. Both she and Linda are happy to talk to anyone who wants to know more about either position.

Linda – Gave a reminder that anyone interested in running is encouraged to send a letter of interest and why you think you'd be good for the position. Julie said those can be sent to her and she will share with the Executive Committee members; and added that people can also self-nominate from the floor at the time of the election.

Membership Committee Report: Linda Wilder

Linda gave a shout out to her fellow committee members: Andy, Sarah, Bek, and Christopher. She said they have worked hard to interest others in joining the Council. Currently there are three open positions they are recruiting for, which include Linda's position as a former or current Vocational Rehab Counselor, Workforce Investment Board position, and the State Educational Agency position. Linda has been reaching out to OSPI for the education position but has not had any luck talking to someone about it. There is one more position, Jacob for the BEP, that will need renewal next year due to him taking over an existing term. Otherwise, the next chunk of vacancies will occur in 2025.

Sean – Has put in a referral to fill his position with someone else from WSSB. Linda thanked him for serving, and said the Committee was directed to try and get someone from OSPI this time, so that's where she's been focused.

Linda added there are two positions that have to reapply every three years even though the position is not held to the two term limit. They are the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and the Tribal VR positions.

Customer Satisfaction Committee Report: Jen Bean

Jen reported there were 12 responses to the survey for last quarter. Overall, they were satisfied. Related to the interaction with DSB staff, 76% were satisfied, 76% were satisfied with the services provided, 90% were satisfied with how the information was received, and overall, they were 76% satisfied. Jen said she will share information today about the plan for getting feedback from more customers.

Positive comments that were shared:

- Throughout the years of being blind, my path has changed several times trying to find something that I could do as a job. However, I never gave up trying to find work and my counselors at DSB never gave up either. Now I'm working and I love the direction I'm headed.
- The folks in the Spokane DSB office believed I could complete my training and maintain employment. I completed my training, and in less than the predicted time. I got a really rewarding and satisfactory job with the result of their training and guidance and support. These folks are the people who helped me the most to be productively employed and I owe them my most sincere gratitude.

Comments on areas for improvement that were shared:

- I quit my job because the two things I needed were not addressed. One is help with reading more quickly, and the ability to share my situation with my employer so they could understand my vision needs.
- There was significant lag time in response, and some kind of assumption I'd be able to do things I wasn't able to do. For example, I don't know how to navigate keeping somebody's phone number.
- I did not feel like my vision concerns were completely understood.

Considering these comments and others that Jen and Doug receive from the CAP, it's important for DSB staff to listen and understand the customer's need and expectations. Similar to the feedback shared at the Town Hall meeting, people want to stay in touch and know what's going on. Regular communication helps with keeping the participants engaged. The other thing is to clarify DSB's processes and services at the beginning of the process. They get many calls to CAP because the participant doesn't understand how the VR program works, and they have expectations of things that are not in scope to be provided.

Jen is excited to share that good progress has been made with updating the customer survey process. DSB has contracted with Washington State University to conduct the survey. The current plan includes sending the survey out quarterly to a random selection of participants in all statuses from eligibility through closure and to send to different people each quarter. Survey results would

be shared with DSB annually in a comprehensive report that will include analysis of the answers to all of the open-ended questions. The new survey will have a total of 15 questions, ten scaled or rated, and five comment questions. Eight of the questions will be from Jen's committee on behalf of the SRC-B, three will be from DSB's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program Manager, and the remaining four will be specific questions from DSB. Jen said a lot has been learned from the larger-scale surveys that DSB has done the past few years around VR services, and she's excited to hear from more participants for the satisfaction survey.

Jen explained the current survey uses a three-point scale to judge satisfaction and the new survey will use a five-point scale. This will be in line with the satisfaction survey sent out by the WA State Rehab Council. Several of the questions already asked in the satisfaction survey will be included in the new survey too, including Jen's favorite "how would you say your experience with DSB has changed or impacted your life pathway?". Jen said they have also looked at the WA SRC for inspiration for questions. Since one of the big concerns is the many people who exit without employment, they're looking at how to ask a question around that, perhaps a follow-up comment question that asks what would have been more helpful to you or something like that. Jen is happy to take ideas from Council members on any other questions to ask. You can email her or any of the survey committee members. Jen will provide another update on the survey changes at the September quarterly meeting.

SRCB Member Report – Kristin Geary, representing Community Rehab Program (CRP) Service Provider

Kristin explained that a Community Rehab Program or CRP service provider offers free employment skills, training, job search, job placement, and job retention services. Kristin works for Washington Vocational Services (WVS) who has a contract with DSB, and also with DVR, to provide those services to participants who request to have more one-on-one experience with job search and placement. Working on interview skills, the job search, and applying for jobs have been the bulk of what Kristin has been providing so far. CRPs can also do community-based assessments (CBA) which is when they will find places in the community for people to work so they can get feedback from the business back to the client and the VRC about where the client is with their skills for that type of work. In addition, some clients ask for job coaching support once they're on the job and with job retention.

Kristin has been with WVS for over six years now and she loves that every case and client is different, with a unique set of goals and challenges for each individual that is placed, and there's never a dull moment. They primarily serve King County and north, and is able to provide some services remotely to folks outside that area.

The first year Kristin started, WVS started contracting with DSB for the YES 2 program and she's been the employment coordinator for that. She organizes the job classes, sometimes finds all the jobs and places everybody. Then she goes crazy over the summer trying to see each student for X number of times and provide reports on that. She has just started with the OTC doing similar services for them including finding unpaid internships, job fairs, and informational interviews.

Kristin shared one of her favorite stories of a DSB client, and how much her agency was able to support the client. One of Kristin's former co-workers had done a CBA with this person, and the report showed that she had a lot of challenges with skills of blindness and other things. When Kristin got the case she knew she needed to get this client an actual job or internship, or volunteer work on her resume because of a significant gap. Kristin worked as the client's job coach when she got a position at the YMCA. The client was collecting, washing, drying, and folding towels from throughout the facility. They had a DSB O&M instructor come out to help the client learn her routes for picking up the towels, and how to start the washer and dryer independently. Then Kristin also provided social skills training. By the time the former co-worker saw the client again she couldn't believe it was the same person with whom she'd done the CBA. She was completely independent using the skills of blindness. Kristin said the client is currently looking for work, and she's been doing it on her own without asking for more services. This client had been a very disempowered young woman who didn't have a lot of independence. She has a ton more now, and it is based on the work she did with the CRPs.

Kristin said she can tell many more of these stories. It can be some of the hardest work she's ever done, but it's also the most rewarding work she could ask for. It's a new experience every day, a new challenge of working outside of the box with people. Blindness isn't just blindness for some people, there are also physical disabilities, developmental delays, and learning disabilities, and they work with all of them. It's amazing the amount of outreach and good she can give to people and to see their outcomes. She said it wouldn't be the same if she didn't see the outcomes, that is absolutely her favorite part of the job.

Michael commented - The customer success story practicing the skills of blindness in a real-world context is so helpful. True for any learning. Hands-on experience can be key. Thanks for making that happen so effectively in that and other situations.

Kristin said that hands-on interaction and problem-solving is why she does this work, getting past these issues or complications and then making a job work for a person is everything to her. She does it for those results. For getting in there, and "getting her hands dirty". Michael thanked her for her passion for the work.

Andy – He is a contractor for DSB, teaching off-site self-defense classes. How can he offer an internship to a participant? He'd actually like to train someone that he can pass his business on to when he retires. Kristin said to give her a call and they'll work on making it happen.

Jacob – Shared a story about working with Janet George at DSB to get someone an internship at the Lighthouse, and how he saw this person go from someone who struggled to get around and was nervous and anxious, to someone who was confident in their skills and independent.

Andy – Mentioned that Kristin's story was in the quarterly report as the OTC Success Story. He really appreciated reading about her journey to where she is today, and recommended that everyone be sure to read it.

Wrap-up/Meeting Adjourned

Meeting was adjourned at 12:00pm.