

STATUTORY COUNCIL ON BLINDNESS MEETING

March 24-25, 2010

Concourse Hotel & Conference Center, Madison, WI

www.blindnesscouncil.wisconsin.gov

PRESENT: Eleanor Loomans, Chair, Bruce Parkinson, Vice-chair, Dave Hyde, Secretary, Ed Weiss, Roberto Torrez, and Bill Gallik.

ASSISTANTS: Sarah Fischbach, Cathy Frosch-Hellenbrand, Kathy Parkinson, Connie Radloff, and Pat Visocky.

ABSENT: Dennis Nielsen, Carolyn Spain, and Joan Wucherer.

STAFF: Linda Huffer and Mary Gorman.

Motion was made by Ed Weiss, seconded by Dave Hyde to approve the minutes of the December 3-4 2009 meeting as corrected. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Bruce Parkinson, seconded by Roberto Torrez to approve the Executive Committee minutes of 2/08/10. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Bruce Parkinson, seconded by Ed Weiss to approve the Executive Committee minutes of 2/21/10. Motion carried.

Chair Loomans reported on visits to legislators. The Instructional Materials Access Bill is scheduled for hearings in the House and Senate on March 31. Opposition is expected from the publishers. Members were encouraged to attend the hearings.

The council discussed the Adult Summer School. As a part of its legislative activities, the body is advocating for a longer summer school, with dedicated funding. It was noted that one strategy is to be involved in the gubernatorial campaign by communicating with candidates running for office.

Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI) – Linda Huffer, Interim Director OBVI has received the ARRA funding for programs and services for older blind individuals. The office will be using these funds to purchase equipment, and to do trainings. They are inviting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), independent living centers (ILC's) Aging and

Disability Resource Centers (ADRC's) and the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired from Chicago. They will be presenting a session on Accessible Technology and one on Issues of Accommodation.

DVR had an audit from the Department of Education which included the ILOB (Independent Living for Older Blind) funds used by OBVI. They stated that OBVI needed to work more closely with ILC's, under the state plan. Linda reported that blind clients indicated they were not receiving adequate services from DVR. One of the recommendations from the audit may be that the ILOB grant be utilized directly by DVR, rather than through OBVI. Linda reported that the OBVI budget is projected to be in the red in fiscal 2011-13.

The Council recessed at 6:15 P.M.

The Council reconvened at 6:45 p.m. for a working dinner. Chair Loomans welcomed Gary Goyke, from the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, who delivered a legislative update. He reviewed the hearing process for bills in the legislature. He stated that that Rep. Roger Roth introduced Assembly Bill 238 (AB238). This bill requires that the Department of Health Services not consider the income of the spouse of an individual who is determined to be medically needy. The bill is currently in the Finance Committee, awaiting a fiscal note. A bill adding a blind veteran to the Veteran's Council (AB835) is scheduled for a hearing on Thursday, March 25 at 2:00 p.m.

The Instructional Materials Access Act is scheduled for a hearing on March 31 at 9:00 a.m. in the House, and 11:00 a.m. in the Senate. This bill would require that blind and other print disabled students receive their books in a timely manner, and sets forth the requirements that the student and college need to fulfill to make that happen (House version AB882; Senate version SB638).

Motion was made by Dave Hyde, seconded by Bruce Parkinson that the Council go on record as supporting the placement of a blind veteran on the Veteran's Council, and the disregard of spousal income for medically needy individuals. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Bruce Parkinson, seconded by Ed Weiss that the Council send hearing slips in support of the Veteran's bill to the hearing. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Meeting continued - March 25, 2010

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Eleanor Loomans at 12:05 p.m.

Present: Eleanor Loomans, chair, Bruce Parkinson vice-chair, Dave Hyde Secretary, and members Roberto Torez, Bill Gallik, and Ed Weiss.

Absent: Dennis Nielsen, Joan Wucherer, and Carolyn Spain.

Members reported on meetings with legislators. During their appointments, they discussed the Educational Materials Access Act, the Adult Summer School, adding a blind veteran to the Veteran's Council, and the bill to disregard spousal income for a person declared medically needy. Discussion was held on strategies to both pass legislation this session, and how to expand the funding for the Adult Summer Program during the 2011 legislative assembly.

Motion was made by Ed Weiss, seconded by Roberto Torrez, that the Chair write a letter to the Secretary of the Department of Health Services, asking that DHS include the \$250,000.00 (two hundred fifty thousand dollars) in the departmental budget for the Adult Summer Program. Motion carried. (Attachment A)

Mary Gorman discussed the Statutory Council web site. It will soon be active and members were asked to check it for accessibility and to suggest items that should be included (www.blindnesscouncil.wisconsin.gov).

Director Position Opening: Mary reviewed the letters sent and received from DHS regarding filling the position of director for OBVI. Linda Huffer stated that when the Department of Administration gives approval to recruit for this opening, she will let the Council know. Members of the Council expressed their appreciation and were very complimentary for the work that Linda Huffer has done and the many accomplishments she has made during her short time as Interim Director.

Council Vacancies: The Council reviewed the membership positions that will be vacant on July 1, 2010. They include those currently held by Dave Hyde, Carolyn Spain, Ed Weiss and Dennis Nielsen. Dennis had submitted his letter of resignation to be effective March 26, 2010 following the Council meeting. The Executive Committee and the full council accepted Dennis Nielsen's resignation.

Motion was made by Dave Hyde, seconded by Roberto Torrez that we open all four positions to one recruitment, with materials to go out by April 15, and returned by May 15. Motion carried.

The chair suggested that initial screening and recommendation be made by the Executive Committee. The Council agreed.

Dave Hyde invited members to attend the convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Wisconsin, April 23-25 in Appleton.

Roberto Torrez proposed an amendment to the bylaws. It was agreed that the amendment be presented to the Executive Committee and, if approved, be taken up at the next regular meeting. (Attachment B)

DVR Report: Joseph D'Costa, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), joined the meeting by conference call. He reported that DVR has hired staff to fill some of their vacant positions. He was unable to tell the Council how many of the new hires have had any training working with blind individuals. He said that the audit performed by the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration had been completed. The report will be available in October. He said that they were told that the level of grants to students was unacceptable, payment up front to employers was unacceptable, and that there needs to be better linkages with independent living centers. He reported that the National Council of Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCSAB) wants to combine some programs under Title VII and Chapter II of the rehabilitation program, including the ILOB grants.

Council Reports: Bruce reported on the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired. They will be having a Philanthropy Day coming up later this spring. Ed reported on Badger Association. They have merged with the Center for Blind Children in Milwaukee. Their president is Rebecca

Williams. Roberto reported on Vision Services Wisconsin. He said that he was unable to attend the January meeting. He reported that they are going to hold a seminar with the U.S. Postal Service on the Free Matter for the Blind and Physically Handicapped mailing program. Eleanor reported that she has had little contact with the Assistive Technology Council. She said that she attended the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. They are redesigning the Youth Leadership Forum, and will be teaching grant writing skills, how to deal with interviews, and how to work with colleges and universities. The number of students they will serve will be limited to thirty.

The members recessed, and expressed their appreciation to Dave Hyde for his service on the Council. Dave said that he had enjoyed his work with the body, and would be anxious to support their undertakings in the future.

The members reconvened, and discussed the up-coming conference call meeting. It was agreed to try to limit the time on the telephone call, but make sure it was sufficient for completion of the Council's business.

Motion was made by Dave Hyde, seconded by Ed Weiss that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dave Hyde
Secretary

ATTACHMENT A

Eleanor Loomans
934 West Brown St.
Waupun, WI 53963

April 21, 2010

Ms. Linda Huffer, Interim Director
Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired
P.O. Box 7851, 1 W. Wilson St., Rm 451
Madison, WI 53707-7851

Dear Ms. Huffer,

I am writing you at the direction and on behalf of the Statutory Council on Blindness relating to a budget concern. The council is fully cognizant of the current financial deficit in the State of Wisconsin, however is convinced that foresight at this time will prevent rising expenditures in the future.

Blind and visually impaired individuals need to learn adjustment and adaptation skills, these include: cooking, cleaning, and self care, orientation and mobility (how to travel independently using a white cane or other assistive device), Braille, technology (how to access computers, dial telephones, use microwaves and ATM machines). The Program also includes personal adjustment to living with blindness that encompasses strengthening social, employment, and family relationships. Continued training is required for adults who need to refine or expand existing skills.

Currently there is *no publically-funded adult residential rehabilitation program* in the State of Wisconsin. Adults who are blind or visually impaired who need comprehensive rehabilitation training do not have the opportunity to learn adjustment skills in a systematic, intensive manner that such programs provide. Due to budget restrictions over the last 10 years, the Adult Summer Education Program, which attempted to fill this need, has been reduced from six weeks to four and one-half days. This short time only provides a brief introduction to the skills required for adjustment and living independently. It is not a sufficient amount of time to both evaluate and teach students the skills that are needed to live independently for a life time.

In the past two years, there have been at least twice as many applicants registering for the Adult Summer School Education Program as could be accepted. Without a budget to support program planning, student travel, lodging, supplies, and training staff, one-half of the adults who have applied have been denied access.

Blind and visually impaired individuals who receive adequate training in a residential setting, remain in their homes longer, and have a higher perceived quality of life. Costs

have been reduced by structured initial and continued adjustment training. According to one of the planning analysts in the Office of Policy Initiatives and Budget (OPIB), approximately 87% of the nursing home population in Wisconsin receives patient care at the skilled nursing facility level. The *MetLife Market Survey of Nursing Home and Home Care Costs* shows that in state fiscal year 2009, the national average payment per patient day for a Medicare or Medicaid recipient in a skilled nursing facility (SNF) was \$192 per day, or \$70,080 per year to house one individual in a nursing home. The Publication No. PDE-3180, *Analysis of Population and Services for Visually Impaired Persons in Wisconsin*, reports that it costs the OBVI an average of less than \$800 per consumer for a successful closure. The OBVI served 1,407 individuals age 55 and older in FFY'09. If the services provided by the OBVI delayed the entry of just 20 individuals (less than 1.5% of their consumers) into a nursing home by one year, the OBVI "saved" \$1,401,600 in state and federal funds, a conservative estimate. This is considerable cost savings as compared to the \$2,282.00 per participant for one week of adult summer education program.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: The Adult Summer Education Program needs to be expanded to provide both initial and continued adjustment training for newly blind or visually impaired adults to maintain their independence. To expand the Program, the Statutory Council on Blindness (SCOB) requests that two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) be earmarked expressly for the Adult Summer Education Program. This GPR amount would be a continuing budget appropriation beginning with the 2011-13 biennium allotted to the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Health Services, in order to expand and broaden the scope of the existing Adult Summer Program. This appropriation would expand summer training into two, 2-week sessions each year; serving a maximum of twenty (20) adults per session, or forty (40) adults for two sessions.

The members of the Statutory Council on Blindness understand the budgetary constraints of the State; however, council members strongly believe that public funding designated specifically for the Adult Summer Education Program to the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Health Services, will expand the opportunity for blind and visually impaired adults to receive an introduction to and training in rehabilitation skills. Comprehensive rehabilitation training received in a residential setting will enable adults to live independently, reducing the potential costs of nursing home care, thereby ultimately saving both state and federal dollars.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Loomans
Chairperson, Statutory Council on Blindness

EL/lkp

Attachment

Statutory Council on Blindness

Position Paper

March 24 – 25, 2010

Adult Summer Program: The Adult Summer Program provides an introduction to adjustment skills training for adults who are blind or have low vision. The daily living skills taught include cooking, cleaning, and self care, orientation and mobility (how to travel independently using a white cane or other assistive device), Braille, technology (how to access computers, dial telephones, use microwaves and ATM machines), all of which require additional skills and techniques to be learned and practiced with limited or no vision. The Program also includes personal adjustment to living with blindness that encompasses strengthening social, employment, and family relationships. Continued training is also offered for adults who need to refine or expand existing skills. Adult Summer School is the only publicly-funded program in Wisconsin that provides adjustment skills to adults in a residential setting. *Residency* creates the continuity necessary for effectively teaching and learning new skills to live independently and helps to reduce the physical and social isolation most newly blind adults do experience.

Problem: There is no *publically-funded comprehensive rehabilitation adult program in a residential setting* in the State of Wisconsin. Adults who are blind or visually impaired who need comprehensive rehabilitation training do not have the opportunity to learn adjustment skills in a residential setting. Due to budget restrictions over the last 10 years, the Adult Summer School Program has been reduced from six weeks to four and one-half days. This short time can only provide a brief introduction to the skills required for adjustment and living independently. Four and a half days is not a sufficient amount of time to both evaluate and teach students the skills that are needed to live independently for a life time. In addition, in June of 2009, the Vision Impaired Program (VIP) that was housed at Northern Technical College in Wausau was discontinued. This was the only program that offered comprehensive rehabilitation and adjustment services to blind adults. Currently rehabilitative services are offered in the field on an itinerant basis by employees of the Department of Health Services, Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Department of Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

In the past two years, there have been at least twice as many applicants registering for the Adult Summer School Program as could be accepted. Without a budget to support program planning, student travel, lodging, supplies, and training staff, one-half of the adults who have applied have been denied access.

Wisconsin is one of few states which do not offer a publicly funded comprehensive training program in a residential setting. The programs that do exist vary from six-weeks to nine-months in length and exist in most states, such as Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Mississippi, Oregon, and Texas.

Background: The Adult Summer Program has been funded through Department of Public Instruction (DPI) with General Purpose Revenue (Chapter 322, Education Laws of 1949). The DPI is mandated by statute to provide Adult Summer School (115.525(c.4.)), however, this is an unfunded mandate and does not provide the budget required for a comprehensive, in-residence, adult training program. Another obstacle to providing comprehensive adult training lies in DPI's mission which is primarily to educate blind and visually impaired children, grades K-12, at the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Janesville, and to provide consultative and outreach services to parents and teachers around the state.

The four and a half days of Adult Summer School training in August 2009, was a collaboration between two agencies: the DPI/Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (WCBVI) and the DHS/Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI). The Stevens Point program served 15 adult students from 24 to 82 years of age. Professional Rehabilitation Specialists from the OBVI provided the rehabilitation skills training. Without the two-agency collaboration, the program would have been significantly limited or not held at all.

On the basis of financial data collected in 2005-2007 by the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Janesville, the average number of participants for a 3-week adult on-campus program was 31; average total cost per program was \$68,171.55 (average per participant, \$2,282.38). For a one-week off-campus program in 2008-2009, with

average number of participants at 17, the estimated total cost per program was \$31,811.66 (average per participant, \$1,945.39).

Note: Even though the overall off-campus expenses were higher, a new client base was reached. The majority of adults who participated had no previous training and more could attend, in part, due to a more central location.

It has been demonstrated that costs to the state and federal government have been reduced by structured initial and continued adjustment training. According to one of the planning analysts in the Office of Policy Initiatives and Budget (OPIB), approximately 87% of the nursing home population in Wisconsin receives patient care at the skilled nursing facility level. The *MetLife Market Survey of Nursing Home and Home Care Costs* shows that in state fiscal year 2009, the national average payment per patient day for a Medicare or Medicaid recipient in a skilled nursing facility (SNF) was \$192 per day, or \$70,080 per year to house one individual in a nursing home. The Publication No. PDE-3180, *Analysis of Population and Services for Visually Impaired Persons in Wisconsin*, reports that it costs the OBVI an average of less than \$800 per consumer for a successful closure. The OBVI served 1,407 individuals age 55 and older in FFY'09. If the services provided by the OBVI delayed the entry of just 20 individuals (less than 1.5% of their consumers) into a nursing home by one year, the OBVI "saved" \$1,401,600 in state and federal funds, a conservative estimate.

Proposed Solution: The Adult Summer Program needs to be expanded to provide both continuous training and adjustment training for newly blind or visually impaired adults to maintain their independence. To expand the Program, the Statutory Council on Blindness (SCOB) requests that two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) be earmarked expressly for the Adult Summer School Program. This GPR amount would be a continuing budget appropriation beginning with the 2011-13 biennium allotted to the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Health Services, in order to expand and broaden the scope of the existing Adult Summer Program. This appropriation would expand summer training into two 2-week sessions each year; serving a maximum of twenty (20) adults per session, or forty (40) adults for two sessions.

The members of the Statutory Council on Blindness understand the budgetary constraints of the State. However, council members strongly

believe that public funding designated specifically for the Adult Summer Program to the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Department of Health Services, will expand the opportunity for blind and visually impaired adults to receive an introduction to and training in rehabilitation skills. Comprehensive rehabilitation training received in a residential setting will enable adults to live independently, reducing the potential costs of nursing home care; thereby, ultimately saving both state and federal dollars.

ATTACHMENT B

Proposed Bylaw Change

This proposal would be an addition to Article IV – Membership

4.8 The Council may, by vote in regular meeting, appoint up to two (2) ex-officio members. Each member shall serve one three-fiscal-year term. They may assist the council, provide direction, participate in discussion and debate, and serve on committees. Ex-officio members may not vote on matters coming before the Council, nor serve as an elected officer. This service shall not count toward the one-year hiatus required in Sec. 4.3.