

**Statutory Council on Blindness Meeting
Meeting of March 9, 2012
Crown Plaza Hotel Madison**

Present: Eleanor Loomans, Chair; Jimmie Davison; Bill Gallick; John Hartman; Joseph Leonard; Bruce Parkinson (teleconference); Roberto Torrez; and Edward Weiss. Assistants: Robin Davison, Marla DeJager, Fouziya Moulai, and Jill Sajec.

Guests: Mike Greco, Tom Heffron, and Dan Wenzel (teleconference)

Staff: Mary Gorman

DVR Report – Mike Greco, DVR Liaison

The DVR first quarter report, distributed before the meeting, was reviewed. Mike was pleased with the vacancy level statewide of only 2-3%. The vast improvement in hiring state employees occurred when the state removed the freeze on positions which also helped to keep waiting lists from growing. The DVR is keeping pace and moving ahead with placements. The Federal Rehabilitation Rate standard is 55.8% and DVR has realized a success rate of over 85%.

Joe asked about the outcomes specifically on the blind compared to other disabilities in general. Mike will obtain the information and get back to the SCOB.

John asked what the contributing factors are to blindness clients not closing the gap in employment. Joe explained that the primary factors were family issues and commitments, lack of transportation, and an unwillingness to move to other parts of the state.

DVR has created Business Service Teams with ARRA funding. A one page agreement was created for employers. DVR meets face to face with employers to explain that 50% of the DVR client salary and fringe benefits can be paid by DVR for up to 90 days. This helps to off-set the employer's training costs. There have been over 1,000 face to face meetings with employers with a success rate of over 85%.

Roberto mentioned that in the past, the DVR had a good relationship with employers but there were no connections to the DVR counselors. He inquired whether there is training to educate the employers now.

Mike Greco stated there are 220 providers. If issues come up, there are DWD directors in the North Woods and Racine and Kenosha areas. They need to teach employers that it is good business to hire people with disabilities.

Joe stated that his experience has shown that university programs in human resources teach students and potential resource managers how to get around the ADA rather than how to distinguish between performance and adaptive issues. Mike stated that the DVR is involving the UW in counselor programs. Job developers are learning business speak vs. rehabilitation speak.

John asked what efforts are given to the Business Enterprise Program model.

Mike stated that the Self-Employment Tool Kit has been revised. Emphasis is placed more on the causes of success and failure in business.

Eleanor stated it will be interesting to see how employment rate relates to the returning veterans with disabilities.

John said that Ken Grant of DVR is developing a relationship with Veteran Affairs. Vets stay in Vet programs. When setting vocational goals, DVR looks for successful persons in businesses and in a variety of jobs. These contacts can provide added training.

A motion was made by Bill Gallik to approve the SCOB meeting minutes of December 6; seconded by Joe Leonard. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Bill Gallik to approve the SCOB Executive Committee meeting minutes of February 16; seconded by Joe Leonard. Motion passed unanimously.

Legislative activity – Eleanor Loomans and Tom Heffron

Ten to eleven congressmen signed on to the proposal sent to the legislative committee from Jeff Mursau. Chair Loomans wrote thank you notes to all and also sent a letter to NFB Director John Fritz.

Tom Heffron, Education Director for the Wisconsin Technical College System, attended today's meeting. He explained that there were three conference calls involving publishers and their attorneys a total of 8 people.

Publishers did not like the public accommodation model. The idea of a repository through the UW System and Technical College System was removed. The timeline would get braille or another alternative text format to the student expediently. He explained that legislators would like to see this legislation as a model for other states. There are now 10 states with similar legislation. There is a chance that the bill will have to begin all over again in the next legislative session.

OBVI Report – Mary Gorman

Mary reported in Linda Huffer's absence. She reviewed the ILOB report for the first quarter compiled and submitted by OBVI Field Supervisor Tom Langham. During the first quarter of FFY'12 the total consumers seen were 584 with 477 over 55. The highest percent of referrals came from family members, self referrals and eye care professionals.

OBVI Rehabilitation Specialist Jim Unger was hired by the OBVI to work in the Rhinelander office. The process of filling the Superior office vacancy is underway. Currently, the OBVI budget is on target. During an OBVI All Staff meeting in May, there will be a discussion on how to provide a program for consumers who need in-residence rehabilitation training. An introduction to the training has been offered by the Wisconsin Center in Janesville but they will not be offering this programming during 2012. Instead, the focus will be on young adults who are transitioning to higher education or work environments. Linda Huffer invited the council to offer ideas on how to accomplish the goal of in-residence rehabilitation training. Further discussions on this issue will depend upon how the Wisconsin State Legislative Committee responds to the council's proposal.

SCOB Recruitment

Chair Loomans stated the current council is a good group of diverse members. She heard through email today that council member Marti Sopher had to resign due to medical problems. That will leave four position vacancies at the end of June. Bruce and Eleanor have served six years and Roberto is up for a second term. He currently intends to reapply.

Jimmie Davison suggested that the by-laws could be suspended through the Robert Rules of Order that allows the Executive Committee to exercise discretion in keeping council members on board and active. He will research the specific rule that could accomplish this and get back to Chair Loomans.

Since there are no fall back names, Chair Loomans expects there will be a full recruitment beginning soon. Several council members offered to help in recruitment efforts: Joe, Bill, Ed and Eleanor will be on the Recruitment Committee. The OBVI office will send the revised application form to them. The committee will meet later May or June and establish timeline so that new members will be on board by the September meeting.

Eleanor explained the Council composition of 9 members with 7 members requiring a visual impairment. The Selection Committee also looks for diversity in backgrounds and geographic representation. Western Wisconsin has not had representation for several years.

Council members discussed the ways the application process could demonstrate leadership and interest in working with disability issues. To determine interest, Jimmie suggested asking applicants about their reasons for supporting issues and serving on the council.

A motion was made by John Hartman to add a question on the application that would have the applicant describe any leadership role played in regard to disabilities in his or her community. Jimmie Davison seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

There was some concern as to whether an applicant who did not have leadership experience would be discouraged from applying. Jimmie noted that applicants who are interested in learning can be highly motivated. The applicant could also indicate an interest in developing leadership experience.

Other Council Reports

Eleanor is waiting for the Council on Physical Disabilities meeting minutes to come from Chair Ben Barrett. Barrett is known to be active both locally and nationally.

The minutes from the Governor's Council on People with Disabilities was sent to John Hartman and OBVI office. They were not summarized so members need to review them on their own.

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & VI – Bruce Parkinson

The council has been working on the Media Access Bill and the November Awards meeting as well as the 60th Anniversary of the Council. The Wisconsin Council's Legislative Day at the capitol is April 17. This year it is expected to be on a smaller scale than in passing years.

Consortium – Chair Loomans will make contact with Linda Huffer in regard to the consortium and its support of the statutory council's proposal.

Joe reported from his meetings in Washington D.C. On a federal level the issue discussed was losing access to benefits and SSDI. If people with disability benefits earn \$1.00 more than the total allowable earnings, it is perceived as a disincentive to work. Wisconsin and other states are engaged in a pilot program called Benefit Offset Demonstration (BOD). People who earn more than the maximum amount allowed would lose \$1.00 of benefits for each \$2.00 dollars earned above the maximum. This will give an incentive to people who want to work. John explained that this incentive to work is a bi-partisan issue as it creates a great social program as well as reduces entitlements.

Wisconsin Center of the Blind & Visually Impaired – Dan Wenzel

Dan reviewed the 2011 Adult Summer School survey . He found that there is a fatigue or fear issue among new members when considering orientation and mobility. O&M was rolled into the Talking about Blindness Class. The groups were smaller which allowed more individual attention.

Roberto suggested that they could teach adaptive techniques to make cooking easier rather than learning to cook starting from basics. It appears that many students already know about cooking basics.

Dan stated that the budget determines what and who can be taught. People who are new to vision loss need to learn cooking techniques as they are less experienced than those who have been without vision for years. Dan explained that some of this redundancy is resolved by rotating students through classes.

The program was unable to teach people independent travel; however, it introduced the O&M skills to foster participant interest.

Bill noted that there were few negative comments about Adult Summer School in 2011, indicating a good program.

In 2012, the Adult Summer Program will focus on young adults and non-traditional students preparing to attend college. This transitional program reaches a different segment of the population. The Youth

program runs for several weeks. The employment program may be cut by one week.

Dan stated that one week preparatory program is not enough time. This is the main complaint of both Adult programs. Programs are designed according to the budget.

Roberto inquired whether the same funding and instructors would be used for this Adult program teaching different activities.

Dan stated that Wisconsin Center staff members enjoy working with different populations and may be teaching students out of high school or older adults who are struggling. He considers it fortunate that the Wisconsin Council and Vision Forward organizations are available to assist.

Eleanor inquired as to what is seen for the future, a traditional program or a college preparatory program.

Dan stated that the Wisconsin Center will look at how successful a program is and then plan the next steps. He hopes that the Consortium members will present to students. The Center administration is willing to try new ideas but wants to hold onto what is successful while developing partnerships and asking who else could be involved.

The Center's Universal Learning Environment is serving 3-5 year olds three days per week.

On the basis of Dan's report regarding the direction of the Adult Summer Education Program, Chair Loomans inquired if there was any need to revise the proposal before the Legislative Committee makes a decision by the end of March.

Roberto responded that the study committee would decide the need for blind adult rehabilitation training and its length.

Next SCOB meeting will be a teleconference scheduled on Tuesday, June 5, 2:00 p.m.

Coming meetings: NFB Conference April 13-15, Johnson Creek.
Wisconsin Council Legislative Day, April 17, Madison.

In closing, a motion was made by Ed Weiss to extend the council's appreciation to Chair Loomans and Bruce Parkinson for their work and

commitment to the statutory council. The motion was seconded by Joe Leonard.

A motion was made by Joe Leonard to adjourn and seconded by John Hartman. Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Hartman, Secretary