

Board of Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired  
March 19, 2021  
Via Zoom

Members Present: Catherine Greseth, Tami Francis, Gaye Mattke, Jenny Anatra, Ryan Groeneweg, Alan Vandenburg, Nichole Nelson, Koni Sims, Jill Kundtz, Cole Uecker, Tana Buresch, Burdette Clifford, Zay Norman.

Members Absent: Elaine Fritz, Cheri Knispel, Marcia Hultman

Others Present: Ronda Williams, Becky Blume, Sandy Neyhart, Raymond Tracy, April Schulte

Catherine Greseth, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Koni Sims made a motion to approve the agenda. Burdette Clifford seconded. Motion carried.

Koni Sims made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 4th meeting. Cole Uecker seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comments: None.

Board Member Updates: Catherine Greseth has been participating in Windmills trainings. Her daughter, Mary, had her eye removed in February. Custer recently received 3' of snow.

Tami Francis has been helping with the Governor's Awards. She has expanded her business as Saddle Creek

Acres, selling products produced on her farm along with the jackets she's been making.

Tana Buresch attended the NDEAM planning committee meeting. She is expecting another baby.

Jenny Anatra presented at the Special Education conference recently. She is preparing a nomination for the Governor's Award for Outstanding Transition Services. She is busy planning for Youth Leadership Forum (YLF).

Ryan Groeneweg has been working on a deaf/blind project in collaboration with National Center on Deaf-Blindness. The 4 courses offered were well attended. The Center for Disabilities will be celebrating 50 years so watch for activities in the near future. His adult children have all moved into their own homes.

Alan Vandenburg is enjoying retirement. He is busy with SDAB.

Nichole Nelson has been conducting interviews for YLF & transition week. She participated in the Special Education conference.

Koni Sims announced the SDAB convention will be held in September in Aberdeen. ACB will be held virtually July 16-23. She testified on bills with the SD Legislature. She had COVID over the holidays.

Jill Kundtz has been busy at the hospital. She is now working in patient care and as a coordinator.

Zay Norman is busy calving on his ranch. His daughter got married this past summer.

Burdette Clifford announced that the tribe is loosening COVID restrictions. He is working on the grant for the tribal VR program.

Cole Uecker is planning to visit subminimum wage employers. The Disability Rights employee in Sioux Falls would like to meet with SBVI & DRS staff in that area to learn more about the programs.

Becky Blume has been working part-time in swing space and part-time remote due to the office remodel.

Gaye Mattke notified the Board that staff were included in the 1C group for vaccinations. The Rehab. Center re-opened on March 8<sup>th</sup>.

Legislative Updates: Ryan Groeneweg and Koni Sims were instrumental in getting HB1196 passed through the legislature. HB1196 is an act that provides free tuition and fees to visually impaired residents for courses not subsidized by the state general fund. Ryan initiated the bill by speaking to Rep. Erin Healy. Ryan and Koni both testified in the House and Senate on the bill. It is an amendment to Codified Law 13-55-11 which reads any resident of this state with a visual impairment who possesses the entrance requirements for admission to any educational institution under supervision of the Board of Regents shall be permitted to enter and pursue any course or course of study offered by such institution, including distance education courses not subsidized by the state general fund, without payment of tuition, library fees, registration fees, or any other fees that other students are required to pay directly to such institution

until the resident with a visual impairment has received two hundred twenty-five semester hours of credit or its equivalent. Any person shall be deemed to be a person with a visual impairment within the meaning of this section who cannot, with use of corrective glasses, see sufficient to perform ordinary activities for which eyesight is essential. The law was originally established back the 1930's and it was amended to include distance/online learning. It passed unanimously through both the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor. This does not pertain to those receiving services through SBVI.

Koni Sims worked with the Secretary of State's office on SB24 which deals with online voter registration. It was amended a few times; however, it was deferred to the 41<sup>st</sup> day. The Secretary of State's office plans to bring the bill back in the future.

Koni also worked on SB77 which requires certain font size for initiated measure petitions and constitutional amendment petitions. Koni testified for size 14 font. SB77 passed both the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor.

Ronda Williams was a committee monitor for House State Affairs committee.

Video conference was an option for testimony due to the pandemic.

SBVI Pandemic Service Delivery Update: Gaye informed the Board that masks and masks with shields have been ordered for staff. SBVI will cautiously begin opening up to the public beginning April 1<sup>st</sup>. Staff schedule in-person visits when necessary. Most staff have been vaccinated.

The Rehab. Center opened March 8<sup>th</sup> but are limiting the number of students receiving training to follow social distancing protocols.

Board Activities/Committees: Disability Awareness Day at the Capitol was organized by Arlene Poncelet, Executive Director of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. Nine organizations attended and five others sent information for gift bags. The Center for Disabilities emailed a video to legislators. Gift bags were distributed to legislators with a variety of items promoting organizations. There were no fruit cups this year, so there was no cost; attendees expressed that the fruit cups were missed. South Dakota Association of the Blind contributed a folder which included a bookmark, information on the white cane, a Braille card, and a newsletter regarding blindness. The next Disability Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Wednesday, February 23, 2022, in the Rotunda.

Governor's Awards nomination forms are now available and due May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Tami Francis and Cole Uecker are on the Governor's Awards committee. Costs for Board members to attend the Governor's Awards ceremony will be covered. In the past, the Public Relations committee has nominated individuals for awards. Sandy Neyhart, the staff liaison, will work with the committee to nominate deserving individuals/businesses.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is recognized every October. Jenny Anatra serves on the NDEAM committee. The NDEAM committee met the end of February to review proposals. Twelve communities were approved for funding. Several communities are sharing speakers.

Koni Sims made a motion to support National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities in the amount of \$5,000. Jill Kundtz seconded. Motion carried.

### SBVI Program Updates:

*Business Enterprise Program (BEP):* Ray Tracy informed the Board that Congress passed the Randolph-Sheppard Financial Relief and Restoration Payments (FRRP) in December 2020, and RSA was directed to manage the funds. In January, South Dakota was notified the BEP will receive \$22,663.00 to be distributed to the BEP vendors. The vendor committee will provide input on how the funds should be distributed. A plan will need to be approved by RSA before FRRP funds are awarded to the South Dakota BEP.

The EROS vendor was awarded \$100,000 through a Small Business COVID Interruption Grant. 2020 was a good year for interstate vending because South Dakota remained open for business. Vivian and Belvidere rest areas are currently under construction. Salem rest area construction will begin in April. Pierre, Huron, and EROS vendors are open and doing limited business. Aberdeen is closed as the federal building is open by appointment and many employees are working remotely.

*Independent Living Older Blind:* Sandy Neyhart reported that the Rehab Teachers continue taking applications and provide virtual or telephonic training. Caseload numbers are down slightly. Staff are anxious to start in-person visits again.

The CCTV program has a number of units that have been in the program for 10 years or more. Approximately 13

people with older units were contacted and offered the option to forfeit their deposit and keeping the machines without paying monthly lease payments. Eleven people agreed to take advantage of this offer. There are currently 202 units in the program.

The Peer Support groups have not been meeting during the pandemic; however, the Rapid City rehabilitation teacher has organized a virtual peer support group that is held the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month at 1 p.m., Mountain time (2 p.m., Central time). They have speakers join to cover a variety of topics. Approximately 15 individuals attended last month's meeting. If you are interested in joining, contact Sandy for the Zoom information.

*South Dakota Rehab Center for the Blind (SDRC):* April Schulte, Program Specialist at the Rehab Center, presented the SDRC report in Dawn Backer's absence. Orientation and Mobility Specialist, Jen Geffre, resigned. The position has been announced and is open until filled. Staff members are providing basic O&M training, and SDRC contracts with Bob Smith for more advanced training.

All SDRC staff have been vaccinated. The Center opened for in-person training on March 8<sup>th</sup>. The number of clients is limited to allow for social distancing. Transition week will be held June 13 through 17. There are 14 students interested in attending. Augustana University has agreed to the use of the dorms. South Dakota Vocational Resources (SDVR) developed a 6-week virtual World of Work curriculum to use with clients statewide.

SDRC's brain injury specialist Mary Tommeraasen is participating in the SD Brain Injury Network which includes several agencies and providers who serve people who have sustained a brain injury. The Center for Disabilities helped coordinate the online networking group. The goal of the group is to discuss how to meet the needs of people with brain injury and share available resources.

*Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):* Ronda Williams has been tracking staff vaccinations and working with the VR supervisor to ensure staff are ready to work with clients, providing PPE. Applications are down, but steadily increasing. Interviews for the counselor position in the Rapid City office will be conducted in the near future. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) will not be doing a monitoring review in South Dakota this year. In order to improve response rate of the VR Satisfaction Survey, a survey monkey email is an additional way for previous clients to complete the survey. The Fall Conference is scheduled for October 19-21 in Deadwood. The theme of the conference is Challenge of Change. Board members are invited to attend, and costs will be covered. The VR Case File Review is scheduled for May 10-14 and will be held virtually. This is a good training and technical assistance opportunity for counselors.

Board Vacancies: Four Board member positions expire on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Koni Sims, Catherine Greseth, Alan Vandenburg, and Marcia Hultman's positions expire as they have served the maximum number of terms. Elaine Fritz and Zay Norman's first terms expire, and both have



agreed to a second term. Gaye Mattke, Burdette Clifford, and Cole Uecker's terms do not have an expiration date. SBVI solicits the nominations based on requirements in the Rehabilitation Act and the Governor appoints nominees to the Board of SBVI. Fifty percent of the Board must be blind or visually impaired. Catherine and Koni are both on the executive committee so those positions will also need to be filled.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC): The SILC met on March 9<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. They had several speakers who covered mental health programs, transit, money follows the person, and domestic violence. It was a very informative meeting. SILC members voted to support NDEAM in the amount of \$5,000. Governor's Awards were also discussed. Catherine Greseth was the Board representative on the SILC; however, since her term is expiring, Ryan Groeneweg was nominated to fill her position.

Director's Comments: The 2021 Legislative Session ended on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Veto Day is March 29<sup>th</sup>. The DHS bills related to Division of Developmental Disabilities and Division of Long-Term Services and Supports passed. One Department bill requested one-time funds for Regional Crisis Centers in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. Currently, the South Dakota Developmental Center in Redfield is the only option for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities to receive a higher level of care.

The state fiscal year 2022 budget includes a 2.4% increase for state employees. Providers received increases to bring them to 100% of methodology plus additional appropriations. Community Service Providers received a 14.8% increase, Nursing Homes 10.96%, and Assisted Living 7.2%. The benefit plans also changed, offering employees more variety in coverage levels and premiums.

Annual Reports were distributed electronically. Alternative formats are available upon request.

South Dakota National Federation of the Blind conference is scheduled for April 24<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. The Board does support attendance.

The next Board of SBVI meeting will be held in Pierre on June 11<sup>th</sup>. Zoom will also be an option for those not able to meet in person.

Koni Sims made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ryan Groeneweg seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned.