

Blind Services Planning Council

Date: Friday, April 12, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Format: Virtual

Chairperson: Sharon Howerton

Members Present: Sharon Howerton, Edward Birmingham, Daniel Hawkins, Dan Tevelde, John Holtgreve, Dustin Cather, and Whitney Hill

Guests: Kim Borowicz, Andy Lasasso, Jasmine Gonzalez, Ray Campbell, Karyn Campbell, Derrick Phillips, and Michelle Scott-Terven

Staff: Brittany Boston, Sarah Blalock

1. Opening remarks: Sharon Howerton, Chairperson

Chairperson Sharon Howerton conducted a roll call for all in attendance. Chairperson Howerton congratulated Judy West on her receipt of an award at the ICB Convention. Chairperson Howerton informed the committee that Horacio Esparza is no longer a member as he did not complete the One-net training. Chairperson Howerton expressed the importance of the required training for members. She shared that Karyn Campbell has applied to join BSPC and the status of her application is pending. Chairperson Howerton provided a brief overview of the agenda for the meeting, noting that all reports have been made available and report outs for the meeting will be brief to allow ample time for the guided discussion around the role and purpose of the BSPC.

2. Review and acceptance of meeting minutes from December 8, 2023

Chairperson Sharon Howerton called for a motion to accept the minutes from the December 8, 2023, Blind Services Planning Council meeting as presented. Edward Birmingham moved that the minutes be accepted as presented. Daniel Hawkins seconded the motion. The minutes from the December 8th meeting were accepted into the record as presented.

3. Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Bureau of Customer & Community Blind Services (BCCBS) Reports

Kim Borowicz, Bureau Chief of DRS, presented the report for the Bureau of Customer & Community Blind Services. The Bureau is focusing on hiring, and a letter

cosigned by the Blind Services Planning Council (BSPC), Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors (ICBV), Illinois Council of the Blind (ICB), and the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) has created momentum in the hiring process. In January, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) was able to post eight orientation and mobility positions, leading to a filled vacancy in Rockford.

Ms. Borowicz shared that Derrick Phillips retired as the Superintendent of the ICRE Wood Training Center, as well as Ingrid Halvorsen, who was the Assistant Bureau Chief for Field and Rehabilitation Services for the Bureau. The Bureau is working on filling those vacancies along with the role of the Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB) Program Administrator. Ms. Borowicz is continuing to support that role in the interim. A Grants Project Officer was hired on December 1st. The position for BEPB Administrative Assistant will be posted soon. Ms. Borowicz shared that Region 1 (encompassing Chicago and Cook County suburbs) has all positions filled. The Illinois Center for Rehabilitation and Education will be posting positions for Rehabilitation Instructors, a Residential Care Worker, and a Receptionist.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program is currently serving 1,579 customers and has closed 82 cases since July by putting customers into competitive integrated employment. Blindness 101 training takes place every week and rotates between the different supervisors in the field to provide proper training to new staff.

Ms. Borowicz echoed Chairperson Howerton's congratulations to Judy West, who is a Rehabilitation Instructor in Champaign, IL. Ms. West was given an award at the Illinois Council of the Blind Conference for her commitment and advocacy to support individuals learning Braille and her work on the Illinois Braille Committee. Ms. Borowicz shared that Chairperson Howerton also received an award at the conference. Ms. Borowicz thanked the committee and closed out her report.

Andy Lasasso, Chief of Staff at the Division of Rehabilitation Services, reported briefly as a proxy for Director Rahnee Patrick, who was providing testimony for the Dignity in Pay Act at the Capitol hearing. Mr. Lasasso acknowledged that one of the items from the letter Ms. Borowicz referenced in her report has not been satisfied. That is a requested meeting with Secretary Quintero and Director Partick. Mr. Lasasso presented the date of April 24, 2024, as a potential meeting time. He advised those in attendance to discuss with others outside of the meeting to confirm availability.

Mr. Lasasso shared that there are currently 30 vacant positions in Blind Services. He shared that Central Management Systems for Illinois did a platform conversion for their Human Capital Management (HCM) software that led to two weeks of not being able to post or move new positions. An update was received that several of the positions have been requisitioned inside of CMS's processes, and those postings should be made public soon. DRS has a current vacancy rate of around 4.3%. Mr. Lasasso closed out his report with an invite for the committee to attend graduation ceremonies at Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI) in Jacksonville on May 24th at 9 AM. Mr. Lasasso asked that those who attend let him or Ms. Borowicz know so their presence can be acknowledged as members of this body. He shared a request from the ISVI Superintendent, Amy Veith, for more interaction with BSPC to benefit the students. The possibility of having a youth member for BSPC was mentioned.

4. Committee Reports

- a. State Rehabilitation Committee (SRC) Sharon Howerton and Kim Borowicz

All committee reports were shared electronically with those in attendance and posted on the BSPC webpage to allow time for a guided discussion around the role and purpose of the BSPC.

5. Consumer Group Reports

- a. Illinois Council of the Blind (ICB) Sharon Howerton
- b. National Federation of the Blind of Illinois (NFBI) Dan Tevelde

All consumer group reports were shared electronically with those in attendance and posted on the BSPC webpage to allow time for a guided discussion around the role and purpose of the BSPC.

6. Guided Discussion on the Role and Purpose of the BSPC

Michelle Scott-Terven, Training Unit Manager at DRS, introduced herself and explained that her role is to assist with the facilitation of a variety of meetings, events, and trainings. She was asked to join the meeting to assist in a guided discussion to allow all council members and guests to participate. Ms. Scott-Terven began the discussion with the question: How would you like to see BSPC's role elevated in Illinois?

Ray Campbell stated he would like to see the BSPC have more input into the budgeting process for DRS and Bureau of Blind Services (BBS). Many members of the BSPC have a finger on the pulse of the rehabilitation needs, and their input would be valuable. The bylaws of BSPC will need to be reviewed to see if this item is included, and some additional education and training on the budgeting process may need to take place throughout the year.

Daniel Hawkins suggested that each BSPC member choose a service or region of support to engage with and learn about. This would allow each member to have an area of expertise and be able to provide feedback on how best to meet the needs of clients.

Ed Birmingham suggested that the council, along with the leadership of BBS, ICB, and NFBI, have a strategic planning meeting in January to year come up with goals, determine where things are going, and what the priorities are for that year. The preferred format of the meeting would be in person, but out of respect for everyone's schedule, a virtual or hybrid meeting would be helpful. Chairperson Howerton suggested this take place at the beginning of the fiscal year in July.

Daniel Hawkins suggested incorporating more consistent communication among the committee outside of the four scheduled meetings to allow for real-time updates. This could be in the form of an email listserv or a texting application like WhatsApp or Discord. Karyn Campbell did ask how the Open Meetings Act might affect the idea of communication outside of the committee meetings. Sarah Blalock stated she would have to review the guidelines, but OMA should not apply to candid conversation in the same way it does for public meetings.

Ray Campbell suggested that BSPC orchestrate a semi-annual town hall with interested parties around the state. This could occur in-person, virtual, or in a hybrid format. Discussion could focus on people's concerns about services or input on support services. Chair Howerton shared that something similar had been attempted over a year ago to no avail but would be interested in reexamining the opportunity.

Michelle Scott-Terven summarized the next steps to the first question as follows:

- Incorporating the budgeting process and discussion and coming up with a system to have those discussions

- Having experts in the group sharing topics and resources
- Potentially having an in-person or hybrid strategic planning at the beginning of the fiscal year
- Identifying how to best communicate outside of these meetings to keep momentum
- Semi-annual town hall meeting

Ms. Scott-Terven moved on to question number two: How would BSPC like to connect with regional areas and front-line staff?

Daniel Hawkins suggested that each member connect with a counselor at their region's rehab office with guided questions for feedback, such as: What success stories can you share? What frustrations do you have? How can BSPC support you? This could occur every quarter or once a month as a means of building connections and support systems for staff. Ed Birmingham supported this concept and suggested that council members have discussions with counselors in other areas as concerns may vary. Mr. Birmingham also stated a concern about building trust with counselors and how to go about that, so they feel comfortable speaking candidly.

Chairperson Howerton suggested the ICRE Wood have their own representative separate from BSPC as the issues they face or different from field issues.

Ms. Scott-Terven moved on to question number three: What are the responsibilities of a BSPC member?

Chairperson Howerton stated that a desire of the committee is to have more than an advisory role and that at times, what the BSPC advises is not acted upon.

Ray Campbell shared that he believed the role of a BSPC member is to attend meetings regularly, actively listen, read prepared materials before the meetings, contribute feedback, and report back to any appropriate organizations. Members need to abide by confidentiality policies and disclose any conflicts of interest.

Chairperson Howerton stated it should not be the place of BSPC to get involved with personnel issues.

Daniel Hawkins stated interest in wanting the committee to know more about what is happening at the state level as well as the client level. Mr. Hawkins also mentioned getting input from the current administration as to what the expectation is for BSPC members.

Michelle Scott-Terven highlighted some of the ideas as a need to define and provide more clarity on roles and expectations, clarity on what happens when BSPC provides advisement, what that process looks like, and how it comes full circle. Also, encouraging the committee to review and potentially revise the bylaws.

Dan Tevelde mentioned the need for awareness about BSPC and its role for the agencies that are reported on, as well as the BSPC understanding the agency structures.

Ray Campbell stated that there needs to be a continued focus and understanding of consumer control and its importance.

Chairperson Howerton asked what the process would be if BSPC chose to revise its statutes. Andy Losasso stated that there are supports in place for when advisory bodies want to make changes to their bylaws and that conversation can be continued in a separate meeting.

Karyn Campbell suggested sharing the bylaws with members. Chairperson Howerton believes they have been shared but will share those again with the committee.

Ed Birmingham noted that many members feel the term “advisory” does not provide a full picture of the role of BSPC. Mr. Birmingham introduced the term “active participation.” This shift may carry more weight than the term advisory.

Michelle Scott-Terven noted that the discussion was coming close to time and thanked everyone for their participation. Chairperson Howerton thanked Ms. Scott-Terven for her time and valuable facilitated discussion with the BSPC.

7. Next meeting: June 28, 2024, 9:30 AM

Chair Howerton stated that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for July 5, 2024. With that being a holiday weekend as well as the ACB Convention, she asked if the committee was interested in finding an alternative date. Daniel Hawkins made a

motion for the meeting to take place on June 28 at 9:30 AM. Dan Tevelde seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

8. Adjourn

Chair Howerton called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Edward Birmingham moved that the meeting be adjourned. Whitney Hill seconded the motion, and the meeting adjourned at 2:33 PM.