

EXECUTIVE BOARD

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

March 26, 2009

MINUTES

In attendance were:

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Co-chairmen

Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD

Charles Richardson

Members

John Bartimole

Carena Collura

Christina Curry,

Cantor, Dr. Mindy Jacobsen

Luis Mendez, Esq.

Julie Phillipson

Tom Robertson

David Stayer, LCSW

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

Brian Daniels, Associate Commissioner

Peter Crowley , Assistant Commissioner

Joseph Nye, Liaison to the Board

Absent were:

Tara Cortes, RN, PhD

Maria Garcia

Karen Gourgey, EdD

The meeting was called to order by Co-chairman Charles Richardson at 8:40 AM.

The minutes were approved as corrected.

Due to the schedules of many members of the Executive Board, the final draft of our annual report was not yet completed. It was hoped that clarification of many questions and prioritizing and paring down of some sections would take place at this meeting, and that we would see a completed draft by the time of the May meeting. Some members expressed the concern that it needs to happen sooner than May, due to the perception on the part of the blind community throughout the state, that we aren't moving on any of its needs. In addition, the legislature would not have time to give our agenda any serious consideration.

John and Luis felt that it might be possible to have something to us sooner because much of the work had been done by the committees. They explained that the executive summary would outline our over all findings and recommendations and be laid out in an extremely concise fashion. It will include a clear statement of the issues identified by the Board as critical to the needs of the blind and visually impaired of New York State along with our principal goals and recommendations to be implemented within specific time frames. The executive summary will be the most important part of the report because most of those who need to see the report will read it, even if they don't read further. The following chapters will address the issues in detail.

TRANSPORTATION

The short list of issues to be addressed in this part of the report refer, particularly, to the parts of the state outside the confines of New York City (excepting Staten Island) and include:

The availability of public transportation;

Effectiveness – routs should reach into all parts of each locale;

Frequency – there needs to be less time between runs;

Cost – even five (\$5) dollars is difficult for the under, or unemployed blind and visually impaired community; and

Training – public transportation personnel need to learn about the REAL needs of the blind and visually impaired.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Many themes will overlap, and might be addressed in the executive summary, but the following are the needs, with reference to social services:

Public transportation must be readily available in order that blind and/or visually impaired people may be employed;

Mobility training must be a primary issue;

CBVH offices need to be located in areas easily accessible to blind and visually impaired clients via public transportation;
There needs to be some means of accountability regarding blind and visually impaired homeless and under-served populations so they can be identified and served;
(this might be addressed by a state-wide registry to be discussed at other points in the report)

EDUCATION

The need for a state-wide registry (to be discussed in detail at another point in this report) comes up again with reference to early intervention, which the committee feels is of paramount importance. This will be included in the report, starting from infancy, or as soon thereafter as possible.

When children have multiple disabilities, visual impairment and/or blindness needs to be listed as the primary classification of disability so that the children can receive the maximum funding possible. A team approach to the child's education needs to be established that includes physical therapy. A strong recommendation will be included that, after the age of sixteen months, blind and visually impaired children be taught in a classroom situation as it has become apparent to professionals in the field that the effects of continuing education by an itinerant teacher, at home, is that inappropriate socialization behaviors are exhibited that do not change as the child grows older.

Alan explained that, some years ago, in an attempt to garner more federal funding through Medicaid, visual impairment was moved from education to the Department Of Health (DOH). Hence intervention services are provided to children from age zero to three by the DOH, and from ages three to twenty-one, through the Department Of Education (DOE). The Department Of Health's focus is not on vision.

Curriculum goals need to include blindness skills and mile stones that are as important as the academic ones.

Job fairs sponsored by the state should help to promote school teachers and rehabilitation teachers of the blind and visually impaired as well as Orientation and Mobility instructors; these are not currently included.

Smaller units of braille instruction should be included in every semester of the university training so that prospective teachers of the blind and/or visually impaired don't become overwhelmed by the current one or two semester practice which is extremely intense and often causes them to drop out of existing programs.

Along these lines, the committee suggests that on-line courses be limited to areas that do not require feedback e.g. braille or orientation and mobility.

There is a need for more SUNY programs that produce qualified professionals in the specific field of blindness – Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRT'S), Teachers of

blind children (TVI'S), and Orientation and Mobility (O & M) Instructors. The only two schools that offer this course curriculum are located down-state and prospective students might not be able to relocate for the time required to complete the programs..

These professionals in the public sector need to be reimbursed at the level of the private sector in order for this field to be a serious contender for their consideration.

The Executive Summary needs to include our certification resolution along with a strong statement requiring that certification of VRT'S and O and M instructors working anywhere within this state be mandatory.

RANDOLPH SHEPPARD

The first issue is the removal of exemptions from the current regulations that will allow the program to grow. This might mean looking into areas, such as the Statue Of Liberty, that have, heretofore, been excluded from consideration. The other exemptions have been outlined at greater length in many previous minutes and were not discussed at this meeting.

The report will recommend that the CBVH thoroughly review the training program for prospective vendors with an eye toward determining what is currently being taught and what will need to be included as opportunities for Business Enterprise vendors grow. The recommendation will be that this review be on-going.

There will be a request that the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) be included as an option in the schools – so that it will be one of the choices offered by the guidance counselors. In addition, CBVH will be asked to give it a higher profile with incoming clients.

THE PREFERRED SOURCE PROGRAM

This part of the report has not yet been edited down to three or four recommendations so the suggested ones are as follows.

CBVH needs to review the IBNYS designations and all legislation surrounding it with an eye toward possibly taking over the responsibility. This would not be a financial burden as the 4-1/2 sales tax makes the program self-sustaining.

Our report should encourage the State Comptroller's office to enforce adherence to the Preferred Source contract within the state agency system. Many covered entities such as the Public School system aren't complying and need to be required to do so. When agencies who should be buying products made by the blind from IBNYS are purchasing them elsewhere, their audits by the state comptroller should reflect that and they should be strongly encouraged to work with IBNYS.

Opportunities for the severely impaired need to be increased. Tasks like re-packaging should be sought and implemented in an effort to expand the number of tasks available for them to do.

there are four levels of Preferred Source products: core craft - corrections department made products, blind made products, disabled program products and veteran made products which could all be placed under one rubric so covered entities aren't confused about who and/or whether they should be purchasing from them.

THE OLDER BLIND

One of the recommendations that was submitted was that a division be set up within the CBVH for seniors with 20/70-20/200 vision because, even this level of vision loss can completely disorient an individual. The recommendation did not go as far as to seek or specify funding sources, but probably should have.

The other recommendation of the committee was that there be a state registry that could be accessed in order to determine what services have been rendered and to chart the course of those still needed.

TECHNOLOGY

One of the recommendations of the report was that information available from any state agency be equally available in accessible form. This would include medical facilities.

It was also suggested that a registry be established where a blind citizen or service provider could go to get information about accessible courses and services for the purpose of aiding informed client choice.

Another recommendation of the technology report was that the Commission's web site be given a more easily remembered address –

VISIONLOSSNY.GOV

As well as a more easily remembered phone number. These should be added to any public relations campaign.

In addition, it was suggested that links be provided from the CBVH web site to places where accessible products can be located.

The need for hard and software to be upgraded and maintained is also addressed in the report.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The report will say that the most important part of this is "rehabilitation". An effective way must be found to integrate the rehabilitation process into the total experience of the consumer. This experience might be through the education system as it effects the transition age child or through the more rapid entry into the rehabilitation system by an adult who has recently lost vision.

John and Luis believe they will be able to have a draft to members via email within the next two weeks. Corrections are to be sent via email, in a separate document, but should refer to the page and line number in question.

Brian told the Board that the CBVH would be receiving \$6,400,000 in stimulus funding – 4.1 million to be dedicated to voc rehab, and 2.3 for the older blind, -- and asked for input regarding its use. He indicated that this was a one-time grant and that it would need to be obligated by September of 2010. He said that suggestions, whether from groups or individuals, would need to be sent in quickly.

It was also suggested that CBVH use stimulus dollars to expand the preferred source program providing support to current and member agencies, and use the financial incentives to grow the program. Other agencies who do not have programs should be encouraged to start them.

It was suggested that some funds be allocated for the teaching of those who would teach the Blind and/or visually impaired. Brian indicated that the CBVH has been asked to consult for SUNY on programs of that nature.

Perhaps equipment that might be used for the older blind might be purchased with some of this money and stored for later use.

Funding for a residential rehabilitation center in New York was suggested.

Additionally, improved accessibility of CBVH offices was placed on the table.

An extension of the length of rehab programs for the older blind was another suggestion.

It would be good to have some centers around the state where Seniors could learn about the technology widely available in the field and discern its applicability to their individual situations. Brian indicated that this was being considered along with independent living centers, community colleges and public libraries.

Mark Leinung, on behalf of Governor Paterson, presented and read a proclamation from the Governor, recognizing the significance of braille and the efforts of the NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND, to promote braille literacy, and proclaiming March 26, 2009, "Braille readers are leaders" day, in the Empire State. Carl Jacobsen, President of the NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF NEW YORK STATE, accepted the proclamation and distributed to the Board, a paper being released by the NFB, which addresses the braille literacy crisis in America.

AFTERNOON SESSION

LEGISLATION

The report will support Assembly bill 2467 and Senate bill 2615 which will secure stable funding for the NEWSLINE program. (NEWSLINE is a service that provides over 275 newspapers, magazines and other time sensitive information to any blind or visually impaired subscriber via a touch tone phone.)

The report will also include the Board's support of Assembly Bill 5485 and Senate Bill 3571 which address the danger of the silence of the new electronic and hybrid vehicles and the threat they pose to pedestrians.

Alan and the JGB staff will write and circulate a press release concerning the legislation we would like to see enacted. Carl will send Alan the appropriate bill numbers.

OFFICE FOR THE BLIND

The Board thinks that the state agency for the blind and visually impaired could be far more efficient and

effective if it were not a part of a larger agency whose concerns are far reaching, and for whom issues of this specialized community must be a small part. We feel, further, that where there has, in the past, been opposition to the current agency serving the visually impaired population with a visual acuity of 20/70-20/200 because it was feared that moneys for the legally blind would be severely curtailed in an effort to serve everyone, a division for this group would be a natural part of a separate agency, whose only concern would be people with vision problems. Since the agency would answer directly to the governor, much time and red tape could be saved and services could be provided in a more timely fashion.

Some concern was expressed that the bill, if either reintroduced or presented in another manor, would need to include more detail about how the change would be implemented, and by whom. Although this level of detail is usually worked out in regulation, it was felt that its existence in the proposed legislation would serve as explanation of its necessity. A committee consisting of Luis, Mindy, David and Tom will be formed to go over the language of the existing bill, to address the above mentioned issues, and make recommendations.

The question of the sense of the current Commission leadership was placed on the table. We understand that once the purview of the agency moves from that strictly mandated by federal dollars to one that must seek funding from other state agencies, the budget could move from some 30 million dollars per year to something (just a guess) around 100 million dollars and its nature would have to change. Peter replied that when the idea was originally introduced and being discussed around the CBVH, there was neither anger nor resentment, but rather a discussion of the means by which such a transition could be made with the greatest ease possible, were that to have been the wish of the Governor.

THE MEETING PLACE

The Board decided to continue meeting in the current facility because we can hear one another better here and the broadcast on the internet is clearer from this room. The Governor's office has assured us that if we need to make public presentations or broadcast via live video, the Blue Room will be available to us.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Cynthia Stuen suggested that, as we think about publicizing a possible Office For The Blind, or the current CBVH, it might be well to consider a new name that either doesn't include or downplays the word "blind", because it is difficult for people who are losing vision to see themselves as blind and/or to accept services that they feel are geared toward the BLIND.

Carl Jacobsen is disappointed at the delay in submitting the Executive Board Report, but is encouraged at the prospect of its completion prior to the next meeting. He expressed the concern that if the legislators see it after this session closes, its effect will be minimized and encourages us to make it happen sooner, rather than later.

He also recognized that there are differences between the ACB and NFB philosophies and agendas, but averred that this Board needed to transcend those differences and move forward with our own. He said that, speaking from his own position, the NFB will certainly continue to advocate for the issues it considers important and hopes that our purposes cross often.

Some suggestions for future meetings include speaking to some of the state agency officers, such as the department Of Health or State Education, about what they do, and how are agenda might segue with theirs, speaking to young people about what would make services more relevant to their needs, Inviting professionals such as counselors, O AND M instructors, rehab teachers about the need, as they see it,
Hearing from JGB scholarship recipients, etc.

Luis will write a summary of our thoughts and we will decide how and when they should be implemented during the first hour and a half of our next May 21 meeting.

It was suggested that when we submit our recommendations to the CBVH, regarding the use of stimulus funds, we copy the co-chairs of the Executive Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted
Mindy Jacobsen
Secretary