DBVI State Rehabilitation Council Minutes – Combined DBVI and SRC Meeting, June 24, 2022

Present: Heather Allen, Jimmy Allen, Kate Bilinski, Sherrie Brunelle, Jerry Doody, Mackenzie Floyd, Tom Frank, Karen Gravlin, Harriet Hall, Melissa Hoellerich, Fred Jones, Joel Klug, Kaelyn Modrak, Charlie Murphy, Steve Pouliot, Olga Pschorr, Paul Putnam, Kelly Wheatley

Please note: Action steps are shared first, followed by narrative minutes.

**Action Steps:**

* Volunteers will work on community event that will report back to SRC meeting on October 27th and DBVI staff in September: Fred, Paul, Melissa, Kaelyn, Joel, Olga and Harriet.
* Kaelyn Modrak will add keyboarding and typing skills to the fall meeting of TVIs meeting to kick off the school year.
* Fred Jones will discuss education, keyboarding and typing skills with John Spinney.

**Narrative:**

Facilitator: Harriet Hall opens and asks for adjustments to the April 28th minutes. Sherrie moves to approve April minutes with following amendments:

* Green Mountain Self Advocates should read with that full title.
* Minutes should reflect the language, “Alternatives To Guardianship.”
* CAP is in the process of doing outreach to the Department of Corrections, adjustment to that language is needed.

Tom Frank seconds. The motion carries.

Introductions: Americorps LEAP Youth Development Coordinator leads the group in an icebreaker activity used in LEAP meetings where youth from NC, CT, ME and VT gather together online to make connections. Notable highlight: Karen Gravlin is gearing up for her first winter in Vermont. Kaelyn Modrak describes, we start preparing for that now!

Harriet introduces Technology Tidbits discussion with SRC members, Tom Frank, Jerry Doody and Jimmy Allen from DBVI.

Tom Frank: Top Tech Tidbits, a newsletter that comes out every Thursday, offers hints on JAWS, Apple, technologies and trainings. For anyone working on an employment goal, technology is needed. I was always a math guy. When I could see better with a powerful magnifying lens, sitting two inches in front of the screen, as an AT Coordinator, I developed a program to keep track of everything. As my vision changed, I had to learn Windows 95. It was difficult to accept this change. I traveled to VA training program, came back with a computer, Windows, JAWS and Zoom. Two years later, I started working with the Social Security Administration. I wanted to ask others in this group, how have you used technology in your life, and has it made a difference? Especially those who are visually impaired. How has it affected your life and your employment life?

Charlie Murphy: It has changed my life. I got my first screen reader with assist GH DOS based Toshiba 20 mega hard drive back in 1988. I had some sight back then. I was able to acclimate over the years, and I use JAWS now.

Jerry Doody: It was 1984 when I got a computer. Once we got it all set up, it changed my employment and my life considerably. In 2009, the iphone put a jet propulsion on my life. Before that, I was not able to access my contacts with a phone. Zoom has also really opened up my life. Now I run tech chats with Zoom. Jimmy Allen has been a great help to me with Zoom and Windows. I read a novel with the Opticon. It took me forever to return the book, because I had to do one word at a time.

Fred Jones: Can you tell the way that it works, what the sensation is like?

Jerry Doody: It was amazing to read a print book like this. You know how your phone vibrates, but it is under your finger locally. You can feel the pins vibrate. The letter is displayed on your finger. You move the camera in your right hand, you are taught to keep in relative straight line, sometimes your finger gets a little numb. My first experience that I was blind was when my brothers brought home books and there was nothing on the page. Opticon was the first time I got the idea of what people were hiding from me.

Tom Frank: I want to point out that things change. In 1971, when I got out of the army, my vision wasn’t that bad. I started a class in chemistry. The book was ok. But then in the chem lab, I couldn’t read the bottles. At first, the CCTV’s got me through college. It is a constant evolution. What serves someone today is not necessarily what will work tomorrow. There is training involved all along the way.

Jimmy Allen: Today I was going to talk about virtual training. DBVI had to transition to online virtual as an emergency thing that we could do. I learned quickly that iphone trainings were incredibly difficult to do. VABVI took on a bigger part of this process. What worked well online was JAWs trainings. JAWs tandem is a feature that allows me to do a remote session where I can hear another person’s screen reader. Because the other person’s fingertips are on the computer too, it allows me to give others more time on their own computer. I did Zoom Text through Google Teams and troubleshooting. Now that I am getting back to in person trainings, I am trying to figure out the balance, online and in-person. I have one person who did the totality of their JAWs training virtually. This did work out. I wouldn’t recommend that for most people.

Tom Frank: I was going to ask others, what are your needs that are not being met for your consumers?

Mackenzie Floyd: I see a need, not necessarily with assistive technology training, but basic computer literacy. For more and more people and older workers those skills are essential. That is what I see.

Heather Allen: I have a lot of people that want to work remotely, most have good internet access.

Jimmy Allen: I see common avid technology users, where the tech is the iphone or tablet. The keyboard is the big stumbling block for them. They are familiar with technology but there are a lot of gaps. I agree technology users need training but not with AT but with basic computer skills.

Tom Frank: Asks about touch typing. I can get you from a B to A if you can learn how to type. This was back in the 70s.

Kaelyn Modrak: Tom, I think that is a really good point. DBVI has students 17, 18 and 19 and they don’t have typing skills. They need a laptop much earlier. Some use a tablet well but it limits their access.

Jerry Doody: in the 90s, they would let people slide with typing skills. If the person didn’t know how to type, in schools, I would ask, why not.

Sherrie Brunelle: IDEA Mandatory age for transition planning is 16 but you can start sooner. In Vermont law every student has to have a personalized learning plan at age 14. We tried to get it changed, down to age 14 in Vermont but that was not successful.

Melissa Hoellerich: When I was in high school everyone was taught to type, you will retain the skill forever if you learn that skill when you are a kid. I don’t think they can find typing teachers. Can we incentivize this and have a really good teacher.

Group continues to discuss typing skills. Online software does not work well for our students.

Action steps: DBVI will add discussion of keyboarding and typing skills to the fall meeting of TVIs meeting to kick off the school year. Fred will follow up with John Spinney.

Jerry Doody: Update on Braille device that national library service is piloting. It is a Braille display with 20 cells. I have read two books and am teaching some to read books with it. It is a good learning tool for Braille. It helps if you have some Braille display knowledge. You can download Braille tutorials, magazines, books tutorials from BARD. Counselors and consumers would have to contact ABLE library and get on their list. It is a demo but has settled in all around the country.

Harriet Hall: We would like another tech talk at another meeting so we can cover more issues. Thank you for your presentation this morning.

Fred Jones: Leads discussion on planning a community, consumer-driven event for the fall or winter that brings consumers together. The format in the past has been Great Expectations, usually held at the Capitol Plaza. It has always been a powerful and meaningful event to current and new consumers, DBVI youth and families. Previous group suggested topic: personal finances and using apps. Overall theme will be employment.

Harriet Hall: I think we should put a strong emphasis on technology. Tom agrees: Remote job opportunities are out there, and you will need to know and use all the technology.

Melissa Hoellerich: Panel discussion to highlight specific company in Burlington along with other remote opportunities.

Olga Pschorr: Invite state colleges disability service contacts (VTC, CCV) to offer workshop on how they make courses accessible, how they take course description, and then an image in the course materials, describe the image and other access.

Melissa Hoellerich agrees: Panel can speak to more than just technology and Johnson State can be added. I think we would find a lot of people who know us who are knowledgeable and could contribute.

Kaelyn and Melissa discuss timing, suggest conference might take place during college break.

Olga Pschorr: Recreational supports in IL and VR caseloads support goal setting, build confidence. A conference workshop could highlight Blind Hockey spearheaded by Joel Klug and other adaptive resources.

Joel Klug chimes in: Vermont has so many great opportunities, but if you don’t have a family member or friend to take you out there, it is difficult. Vermont Adaptive and other resources can share information.

Fred has a process in mind to develop the conference that builds on intent or the goal of this day. Next SRC Full council meeting will be on October 27th. Next official DBVI staff meeting will be in September. DBVI will start a small planning group that will communicate back to those teams.

Volunteers: Paul, Melissa, Kaelyn, Joel, Olga and Harriet. All acknowledge Peggy Howard’s passion and good energy building this event.

Tom motions to adjourn. Heather seconds. The motion carries.