

Maine State Rehabilitation Council

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

State Rehabilitation Council

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Maine

October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020

Message from the SRC Chair

It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired State Rehabilitation Council (DBVI-SRC) Chair for the past three years. On behalf of the DBVI-SRC, I am pleased to submit the 2020 Annual Report. Our Council is engaged and continues to work towards a strong system of supporting individuals who are blind and visually impaired. I am so proud to be connected to the work of our Council as we have so many dedicated members contributing to our vocational rehabilitation programs. The volunteer time put in by our members are appreciated as those hours go into working in partnership with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I have learned a lot, grown a lot and I am a better person for working with such wonderful people!

 *Cheryl Peabody, Chair*

 *DBVI-SRC*

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STATE OF MAINE



DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

BUREAU REHABILITATION SERVICES

 LAURA FORTMAN

 COMMISSIONER

DIVISION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED

150 SHS, 45 COMMERCE DRIVE

JANET T. MILLS

GOVERNOR

Director’s Message

This year, 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. This was a year full of celebrations for all the good work and successes of the VR program. DBVI even had a Business Enterprise Program manager featured on the national stage in one of the VR celebratory events!

This year was also a very challenging one as we experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. DBVI staff rose to the challenge and began using their creativity to come up with alternative solutions to continue to provide services to consumers. Some of the new services included virtual mock interviews, virtual job shadowing, and virtual counseling and guidance on job preparation skills, resumes, disability disclosure, and career exploration to name a few. DBVI consumers also attended a virtual training that provided pre-employment transition services. Both consumers and staff had to quickly learn how to maneuver in the virtual world.

DBVI made a concerted effort to maintain contact with consumers during the pandemic with a concern about safety and social isolation.  We respectfully listened to their interests/needs to drive the nature and degree of service engagement during this unprecedented time and consultation with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was invaluable.

The SRC was well-informed on the DBVI events/programs throughout the year and provided valuable, constructive feedback. They participated in the 100th anniversary celebrations, heard many success stories within the VR program and collaborated with DBVI on matters such as the state plan and new procedures. DBVI appreciated the expertise, support and advocacy from the SRC members especially during this unprecedented time.

DBVI will continue to work collaboratively with council members to improve services for Maine citizens who are blind or visually impaired utilizing program and fiscal data, suggestions from consumer satisfaction surveys, and making necessary adjustments as we learn more about the impact of the pandemic and its effects on DBVI consumers. Together, we will make positive changes that will enhance services for consumers to enable them to either retain, gain or advance in employment or to live independently within their own community.

Sincerely,

Brenda Drummond

Director, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

BEP Annual Update: FFY2020:

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) Business Enterprise Program (BEP) had a year unlike any other due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Up to March of this year, the program achieved positive results in terms of 9 Managers being successfully self-employed at over 19 Federal, State and Municipal/Public locations. Facilities include cafeterias, snack bars, Micro Markets and Vending. A BEP semi-annual manager meeting was held in October 2019. During this time, updates on budget, vacancies, training as well as National Randolph-Sheppard (RS) activities were shared. Meetings also allowed for the exchange of ideas, business practices, vendor information and other valuable resources. When State and Federal facilities shut down due to the pandemic, forcing employees and BEP customers to vacate their office locations, the program and more importantly, manager livelihoods were significantly and adversely impacted. A few managers obtained some relief by utilizing federal emergency and pandemic assistance programs and participating in expanded state unemployment benefits, however, this did not replace their ability and desire to be fully operating and serving customers. Also, some managers kept their facilities partially open for handfuls of employees who were unable to telework and remained at their offices. The State Licensing Agency (SLA) kept in close contact with Randolph-Sheppard (RS) leaders, BEP Administrators from other States and RS Advocates across the country in order to keep Maine BEP managers informed regarding pandemic relief, legislative bills concerning RS programs being submitted to RSA, Congress and to ensure that innovative ideas from other States were shared. Managers were and continue to be encouraged to reach out to their colleagues, peers and to participate in virtual meetings and trainings that will benefit them during this most challenging time. As of September 30, the status of BEP Facilities are as follows:

**CAFETERIAS; SNACK BARS – 7**

Cross Café – open for preorders and take out as well as prep for Micro Markets;

DMV – open (sub-contractor), however, employees are on a split rotation of 50% occupancy at a time (sub-contractor);

DOT – still closed;

DEP – still closed;

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS) – still closed;

Camp Chamberlain – open, however, facility is not fully occupied (sub-contractor);

State House – closed permanently

**MICRO MARKETS – 8**

Presque Isle (1); Bangor (2); Augusta (4); Portland (1) – all open, however, occupancy varies significantly and overall much lower numbers than pre-pandemic

**VENDING ROUTE – 1**

Bangor – Court house; EMPF; OHI; Career Center; Job Corps; EMCC; Fort Knox – some locations have completely shut down and others are just barely operating

**NEW LOCATIONS AND VACANCIES**

The BEP was asked to open a new Micro Market at the CDC in Augusta; 1 BEP manager of a Micro Market in Augusta left the program; 1 BEP Manager resigned as manager of the PNS site and a new BEP manager is coming into the program to take over this location

**RFP FOR VENDING (SNACK AND BEVERAGE) AT UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEMS (UMS)**

Continue to work with the UMS on a draft that will include BEP related concerns and statutory considerations

**BEP RULES**

BEP Rules – Amended and sent to RSA for approval. Once we receive this, we will start process in State to Repeal existing and Replace with amended Rules

**BEP TRAINING CURRICULUM**

Ad Hoc committee consisting of 2 BEP managers and 2 SLA staff developed a new BEP Training Curriculum for prospective BEP Managers

**BEP TRAINING AND UPWARD MOBILITY**

Virtual BLAST training, Webinars and Conferences were held during the Spring and Summer, providing BEP managers and SLA staff with opportunities to gain skills, knowledge and stay connected with Randolph-Sheppard partners during this unprecedented time

SRC Mission

The mission of the Council is, in partnership with the Director of the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, to formally provide leadership and diverse viewpoints in order to effectively develop and evaluate programs, policies and services, and to influence, at the systemic and policy level, the direction of those services to the blind and visually impaired population of Maine. The Council will also partner with the Division to identify priorities that help create opportunities, increase independence and broaden access to the workplace for citizens of all ages who are blind or visually impaired.

SRC Responsibilities

The SRC is tasked to: review, analyze and advise regarding responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA (2014), particularly related to:

* Eligibility and Order of Selection
* Extent, Scope and Effectiveness of Services
* Functions Affecting Individual Achievement of Employment Outcomes
* Application, Reports and Evaluations

SRC Members

Cheryl Peabody – SILC Representative

*Cheryl has a BS in Psychology from the University of Maine. She worked for the Social Security Administration for 17 years as a Disability Claims Adjudicator. She currently devotes her time doing volunteer work with several Governor-appointed councils and non-profit organizations involving education and advocacy for individuals who are blind/visually impaired.*

Tara Hembree – Parent Training & Information Network (pending)

*Tara is an Information Specialist at the Maine Parent Federation where she connects families as well as professionals with resources to help them best advocate for their children. She brings with her over 20 years of experience with the Medicaid program working in both the public and private sectors.*

Julia Endicott – Client Assistannce Program (pending)

*Julia Endicott is a CAP advocate at Disability Rights Maine.  Julia grew up in Rockport, MA and attended Colby College, where she graduated with a B.A. in Global Studies.  She then moved to Colorado, where she worked as a paralegal focusing on civil rights, employment discrimination, and immigration cases.*

James Howard – Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

*James have been working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for 14 years, with the Maine Bureau of Rehab Services.  For nearly 10 years James worked as a counselor with a hybrid DVR transition and adult caseload.  For the past 5 years James has specialized in blind and visually impaired rehabilitation needs, and immersed into the BVI world.  James has a passion working with transition students, collaborating with numerous agencies, who collectively have the same goal for Pre-ETS students and meeting their vocational aspirations and independent living goals.*

Amber Mooney – Community Rehabilitation Provider

*Amber received her master’s degree as a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist from the University of Massachusetts at Boston.  She has been working for The Iris Network for over eight years.  Her career has spanned from Portland to Fort Kent and back.  Currently, Amber is the Program Coordinator for The Iris Network Rehabilitation Center and manages the Low Vision Center.*

Nancy Moulton – Community Rehabilitation Provider

*Nancy has been with Catholic Charities Maine for 32 years. She began as a teacher of students with visual impairment, then as a supervisor and currently as Program Director a position she has held for 10 years. She has a Masters in Education and a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership. She loves to work with her staff to explore new and exciting ways of teaching skills to students with a visual impairment that they don’t always find as exciting as she* ***does.***

Mary Beth Walsh – Business, Industry, Labor

*Mary Beth Walsh has worked in the state of Maine blindness system for 36 years. She is certified as an orientation and mobility specialist, a rehabilitation therapist and a low vision specialist as well as an assistive technology specialist.  Since 2004 she has been self employed under the name Mainely Access Inc. providing statewide assistive technology services.*

Allen Kropp – Business, Industry, Labor

*Allen Kropp is an attorney with Drummond Woodsum in Portland Maine.  He specializes in civil rights and disability law, and works with schools, colleges, and universities on a wide range of civil rights matters under federal and state laws.  Previously, Allen held several roles within the United States Department of Education, including Deputy Chief Attorney and Interim Director of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in Boston, as well as Regional Commissioner with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the federal oversight office for Maine DBVI and DVR.*

Kathy Bagley – Business, Industry, Labor

*Kathy is an Assistive Technology Specialist and Owner-Operator of Excel Consulting, which provides services throughout the state of Maine. Kathy has worked with people who have disabilities for over twenty five years and loves assisting others in gaining skills, confidence and independence through the use of adaptive technology.*

Sherry Belka – Disability Advocacy Group

*Sherry has been employed by the State of Maine for over 20 years. She is currently the Senior Staff Accountant for the Treasurer’s Office. Sherry believes in serving her community and, in addition to her role on the SRC, she is the current president of the American Council of the Blind of Maine. Sherry is also a member of the Augusta Age Friendly committee.*

Walter Woitasek – Disability Advocacy Group

*Walter has been active in the work of the National Federation of the Blind for over 40 years and has also served as Pastoral leader for many United Methodist and United Church of Christ congregations. Walter has also served on the Iris Network Board of Directors, a private agency serving the needs of blind people in Maine. At present he represents the National Federation of the Blind as a member of the State Rehabilitation Council.*

Joel McQuade – Disability Advocacy Group (unavailable)

Patricia Sarchi – Dual Sensory Impaired (unavailable)

Roger Fuller – Curren/Former VR Client

*Roger is a retired educator with 42 years of experience as an English teacher, department chair, and principal - in various places.  He served as a state representative for one term, retiring in 2018.  He is married and has two children, both teachers, and five grandchildren.*

Darcy Gentle – 121 VR Program Representative

*Darcy Gentle is a member of the Maliseet Community. Darcy attended the University of Maine in Augusta. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Mental Health and Humans Services, an associate's degree in Social Services, and her MHRT-C. IDarcy also graduated from the University of*

*Southern Maine with a Master of Science in Counseling Rehabilitation. She has worked for the Maliseet Tribe for the last five years and provided Vocational Rehabilitation services to the Maliseet Tribe, The Micmaq Tribe, and the Passamaquoddy Tribes. The program has been very successful and will continue to be successful with the support and collaboration from all the programs that provide direct services to native communities.*

David Emberley – State Educational Agency (pending)

*David Emberley is a Due Process Consultant in the Effective Dispute Resolution Office and also serves on the ESBVIC QA.  David brings 30+ years of experience in the field of special education including administration, case management, evaluation and teaching.*

Joshua Howe – State Workforce Development

*Joshua is a Program Coordinator with the State Workforce Board. He holds a BA in Psychology and English Literature from Clark University and an MA in Rehabilitation Counseling from Assumption College. He has spent most of his career working with and for people with disabilities in mental health and rehabilitation and has been with the State for 18 years.*

Brenda Drummond – VR Agency Director

*Brenda Drummond became the Director of the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) in June 2017.  She has held many other positions within DBVI, including Assistant Director, Consultant and for many years the Administrator of the Business Enterprise Program. Her background is in rehabilitation and business administration.*

\*\* 7 of our appointed 15 members are individuals who are blind or visually impaired or 46.6%. Our membership Committee is working diligently to recruit new members.

SRC Activities - A Year in Review FY2020:

The DBVI-SRC met six times during FY2020. The SRC met bimonthly with committee work done between full Council meetings. At the annual training, the SRC put a work plan for the year in place, including going over tasks the SRC is mandated to do, with committee assignments. Committee reports and updates on agencies/organizations represented on the Council by members were given at each meeting. Order of Selection (OOS) was not addressed because DBVI did not have a wait list in FY2020.

Guest speakers at the full Council meetings included:

Lori Spencer who spoke about Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) which is the number one cause of visual impairment in children.

Christine Robinson, the Director of the Division of Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance, presented on the new WIOA common performance measures.

Amber Elliott, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), did a presentation on adjustment counseling for individuals with vision loss.

In April, VRCs, IL Case Managers, O&M instructors, TVIs and VRTs attended the SRC meeting to speak on how their jobs have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are now working with clients. Some of the creative things they were doing include: utilizing teleconference and videoconference to check in on clients and ensure they are safe and that their needs are met; teaching and/or providing training, either individual or in groups, through teleconference and/or videoconference; providing video resources to clients; all of which improved the technology skills for both staff and clients.

David DeNotaris, creator of the Advocacy + Communication = Employment (ACE) Academy, spoke on his program. Mr. DeNotaris works with students on work readiness and self-advocacy skills.

Client Success Stories: At each SRC meeting, there was a section called “How VR Helped Someone”. This is time for DBVI staff to tell how empowering VR services can be. One success story evolved when a DBVI client was able to get a job at a hospital. Some rooms that needed service were being skipped so there was some talk about the client not being able to do their job at the hospital. The client was able to self-advocate with their supervisor and came up with a color-coded system to use outside a room when a room needed service. The client remains successfully employed.

The DBVI-SRC received reminders for all National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council (NCSRC) national calls. The NCSRC spring conference was cancelled due to the pandemic.

The SRC supported the Chair sending a letter to Maine’s Congressional Delegates in support of USDOE Secretary DeVos’ letter to Congress dated April of 2020 requesting fiscal flexibilities in VR spending in light of the pandemic.

The State Plan: The SRC worked in partnership with DBVI in planning and reviewing the State Plan. Comments from the SRC were given and were included in the State Plan.

VR Program - A Year in Review FY2020:

Peer Mentoring program: training was done in October of 2019. They wee hoping to have the program fully operational in March of 2020. In April, it was reported that the program has not moved forward due to the pandemic.

Youth Advisory Council: A meeting was planned for November of 2019. The November meeting was cancelled. A meeting was scheduled for January/February utilizing remote access so students could more easily attend meetings. In February, the meeting was cancelled due to lack of participation by students. This program has moved forward as it was done remotely.

College Prep program: This program involves a handful of blind/visually impaired students living on a college campus for two weeks. They take a college course and get a taste of what college life is like before going off to college full time. DBVI had to cancel their College Prep program in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Apprenticeship Program: Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) started the development of the Apprenticeship Program pilot in Maine in one of Maine’s urban areas (Lewiston/Auburn area). The Apprenticeship Program team worked with WINTAC and VR staff from other states who already had programs in place. To be in a registered apprenticeship, one has be at least 16 years of age, meet the employer’s criteria and work either part-time or full-time. Participants received a paycheck with wages that will increase as skill level increases. The focus for this pilot program was in food service and hospitality. In December of 2019 and January of 2020, Maine BRS did presentations for staff on the Apprenticeship Program statewide with Community Rehabilitation Providers and other states in attendance. It generated a lot of interest. The benefits of this program to employers included: reduced turnover costs, higher productivity and connection to training funds. The benefits to participants included: increased skills, getting paid and mentoring while learning. The program received several referrals with the first VR client signed up by December of 2019.  The program went statewide by February of 2020. BRS worked with the Maine Apprenticeship Program and the Bureau of Employment Services to get grants to secure funding for the program. In August of 2020, it was announced that a grant was awarded in the amount of $450,000.

Client Assistance Program (CAP): BRS changed the way the CAP administrator is selected to eliminate any perception of a conflict of Interest. After a Request for Information was put out, all materials were reviewed by Maine’s Governor, Janet Mills. After a public comment period, a new administrator was selected by the Governor. Disability Rights Maine was selected as the new CAP administrator.

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS launched a new website called Workforce Opportunities, Referrals and Knowledge (WORK) Services. The website brought together the Bureau of Employment Services, DBVI, Division for Vocational Rehabilitation and Adult Education. It served as an online program for those who are interested in education and training. Depending on how individuals answered questions, it would direct them to the services they want. If they wanted to apply for VR services, they would be able to fill out an application on the website. The users were able to give consent to have reports done by one agency go to another agency right on the website. [Of note, subsequent to September 30, 2020, this platform was discontinued.]

Obviously COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on DBVI. They quickly went to remote intakes, assessments, IPEs, Virtual Career Exploration Workshops (VCEW), Virtual Job Shadow website, etc. BRS held weekly meetings with VR stakeholders to keep them informed on services through the early part of the pandemic. The restrictions had eased a bit towards the end of FY2020 and DBVI staff had the option of working remotely and in the office; seeing clients remotely, or, if the client was comfortable, seeing clients in person. All of this was done following the CDC safety guidelines.

Consumer Data for PY2019

For BRS, Major Disabling Conditions:

* Blind/Visually Impaired = 3.7%
* Deaf/Hard of Hearing = 11.7%
* Physical Disability = 11.7%
* Cognitive Disability = 30.7%
* Mental Health Disability = 32.1%

DBVI New Applications = 65

DBVI Individuals Placed in Competitive Employment = 25

Age at Application:

* 13-22 = 28.4%
* 23-54 = 46.3%
* 55-64 = 15.3%
* 65 and Older = 10%

Education at Closure:

* Less than High School Diploma = 9.8%
* High School Graduate = 40.2%
* Some College = 18.6%
* College and More = 31.4%

Consumer Satisfaction:

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired received feedback from consumers. Of those who responded, 100% rated staff on courtesy/helpfulness as very good/excellent; 80% responded that the promptness of the service was good/excellent; and 80% responded that the treatment as an individual was very good/excellent. Of those who received Orientation & Mobility training and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, 60% rated these services as excellent; of those who received Low Vision Services, 80% rated these services as good/excellent. While most all felt that they participated in the choice of goal/services, all did report that they felt they achieved their goals with the help of the VR program. 100% of those who responded said they were told about the Client Assistance Program. Of those who responded, 100% were satisfied/delighted with their overall experience with DBVI.

Overall, the comments were very positive and constructive. There was a suggestion that the division could improve its response time as well as a comment that more of the general public needs to know about this “necessary and very well managed program”. Another comment said that “you can’t fix perfection".

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired did receive feedback from consumers on the Independent Living program. Of those who responded, 99% responded with excellent/very good on courtesy and helpfulness of staff; 98% responded with good to excellent on the promptness of services; and 100% were satisfied with how they were treated as an individual.

Of those who had Orientation & Mobility training, Vision Rehabilitation Therapy or Low Vision Services, 99% felt that their services were good, very good or excellent. Of those who responded, 97% said that they were involved with choosing their goals and services and that they achieved their goals. Ninety-eight percent said that they were informed about their right to appeal decisions. Overall, 94% were satisfied, very satisfied or delighted with their experience.

Contact Information

Cheryl Peabody, Past Chair,

DBVI-SRC

October 2017 – October 2020

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Nancy Moulton, Chair,

DBVI-SRC

October 2020 – Present

nmoulton@ccmaine.org