South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
July 18, 2023

Notifications of all regular, called, or special meetings are compliant with FOIA requirements, Section 90-4-80.

# Call to Order

Vice Chairperson John called the meeting to order at 3:03 pm. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

Susan John, Vice Chairperson
Cathy Olker, Secretary
Ron Coleman
Dan Hanfland

Erica James
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Dan Hanfland made a motion to accept the July 18, 2023, Agenda. It was seconded by Ron Coleman. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

Amy Hatten inquired if there were any updates about sidewalk access to the Charleston office from the bus stop. Commissioner Graham responded that SCCB was working with the Department of Transportation and Berkley-Charleston-Dorchester County of Governments on the issue. Also, SCCB was checking to see if the agency could assist with building the sidewalk.

# Approval of Minutes

A brief discussion occurred among the board commissioners regarding whether the minutes should be in bulleted or narrative format. Dan Hanfland made a motion to accept the narrative version of the minutes since it provided more information. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. The motion passed unanimously.

Ron Coleman made a motion to accept the March 28, 2023, minutes. It was seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Commissioner Graham thanked Mark Gamble and the Leadership Team for planning and providing two trainings to the Board of Commissioners. The final training will cover the Freedom of Information Act (FIOA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and similar topics.

SCCB held its annual Employee Appreciation event at Segra Park on June 2. Food, games, and special activities were enjoyed by all.

A meeting was held with Chaz Compton, San Diego State University, to discuss possible revisions to the agency’s Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The final version is expected to be completed next month and will be presented to the Board of Commissioners.

As a result of a previous meeting with the Director of Lions Vision Services to establish a partnership, the agency has worked collaboratively to provide two preventative procedures, with one additional referral in process.

Commissioner Graham provided welcome remarks at the Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities Virtual Awards Ceremony. Charlene Allen, Employment Consultant in the Greenville office, presented Miriam Lozneanu with a 2023 Employment Achievement Award. Miriam is legally blind and partially deaf. SCCB assisted Miriam in obtaining a bachelor’s degree in computer science from Clemson University by providing tuition sponsorship, assistive technology devices to help in the classroom, and orientation and mobility introduction to the campus. While exploring career options, Miriam participated in a Develop Carolina Fellowship. The six-month program prepares new graduates for software development careers and led to her being hired by Booz Allen Hamilton, where she has been employed for 11 months as a remote software developer.

Twenty-nine students participated in the three-week Summer Teen Program in June (compared to 19 who attended last year). Week one featured Water Viz, an interactive program about the components of the water cycle presented by Dr. Tina Herzberg a professor and coordinator of the Visual Impairment Education Program at the University of South Carolina Upstate; Mary Robbins, teacher of the visually impaired at the SC School for the Deaf and Blind, and Water Viz Founder Dr. Lindsey Rustad, Director of the USDA Northeast Climate Hub (and one of the 120 most influential women in science). Week two featured STRIVE4YOU, an organization owned and operated by individuals who are blind or visually impaired. They held workshops on adaptive sports, personal safety, and independent travel. Instructors included Ricky Jones, Christy Array Jones, Lucy Mallahan, Nathan Green, and Sue Park. Week three featured the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) career lab led by Dr. Thomas Madura. physics and astronomy professor at San Jose State University, and Dr. Carol Christian, astrophysicist at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, and Hubble Space Telescope Outreach Project Scientist. The presenters, SCCB staff, and NFB’s Successful Transitions were thanked for making this year’s summer teen program a success.

New employees Whitney Moore, AWARE Systems Administrator; Tabitahia Hunter, Older Blind Counselor in Greenville; Elissa Tarpley, Older Blind Counselor in Charleston; Marquita Taylor, Grants and Budget Accountant; Cathy Loy, Accounts Payable Accountant; Georgia Matthews, Receptionist; and Carol Anderson, Consumer Services Director were welcomed. Carol Anderson has more than 20 years of experience serving individuals with disabilities. She previously served as a Quality Assurance Director and Consumer Services Director at the Vocational Rehabilitation Department. Nikki Green was selected as the new Independent Services Lead for Prevention, Older Blind, and Children’s Services.

A group of SCCB transition students recently toured the South Carolina Aquarium for hands-on educational activities, career exploration, self-advocacy, and they performed the National Anthem at the Southern Legislative Conference.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget – The agency is 100% through the fiscal year with spending at 93%. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 100% of the budget, the Training Center 98%, Transition Services 89%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 95%, Prevention of Blindness 76%, Older Blind 100%, Children’s Services 96%, and Administration 98%.

Federal Grants – The 2020 and 2021 VR grants were closed out. VR has utilized 74% of the 2022 grant, pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) 53%, Older Blind 100%, and Supported Employment 17%. Criteria will be met to carry the 2023 grant forward to a second year of spending.

Capital Improvement Projects

* The generator replacement project and the new lights for the parking lot should be completed by the end of August.
* The site improvements project is in the final stages of completion. The courtyard has been completed and resurfacing of the parking lot will begin once the old generators are removed.
* The bid phase for the HVAC replacement project was competed and will move to the planning stage. Building A renovations will coincide with the HVAC project.
* The renovation of two capital complex BEP stands is in the final design phase. Both stands will incorporate a micro market.

# Human Resources Report

## Kranisha Billie reported:

In FY 23, SCCB hired 29 individuals into full-time positions. Total full-time positions filled in FY 23 was 95, compared to 83 last year. The turnover rate for FY 23 was 22%, compared to 40% last year (an 18% decrease). HR is working on new initiatives to further decrease turnover.

The Counselor Series track created a career path for counselors which resulted in a 67% reduction in turnover of these critical positions in FY 23.

The recruiting team plans to attend career fairs across the state and nation to find qualified applicants. They recently attended a job fair at the National Federation of the Blind Convention where several qualified individuals were interested in applying for positions at SCCB.

Equal opportunity data shows the agency’s workforce is the most diverse it has been in nearly a decade. HR’s goal is to meet or exceed last year’s numbers.

HR began onboarding management and staff into a new performance management system at the end of FY 23. HR will complete this process in FY 24. HR and selected staff received training on a new Learning Management System which will be a hub for training for all employees.

# **Consumer Services Update**

## Kimberly (Niki) Outen reported:

The Training Center is serving 13 consumers with an additional three consumers scheduled to begin this month.

The vacant Braille instructor position will be expanded to include iOS and Android operating systems training, how to use Voice Over on smart phones to navigate emails and texts, and assist with daily living skills. In the interim, another instructor will teach the braille classes.

In the Student Internship Program (SIP), 5 college- level consumers were placed at Hilton Garden Inn – Homewood Suites in Summerville; Lowcountry Event and Conference Center (owned by Lowcountry Hotels); Anderson County Disabilities and Special Needs Board; Greenville Memorial Hospital; and Palmetto Goodwill (Carolina Forest store). A consumer participating in SIP showed an interest in obtaining experience in Hotel Management. They were offered an internship with Hilton and the Low Country Event and Conference Center. They worked in the Food and Beverage Department, Engineering, Front Desk, and the Sales Department within the hotel and conference center. The consumer is currently studying Hospitality at Clemson University.

The VR Program Lead attended the National Federation of the Blind Convention in Houston, Texas, along with representatives from Successful Transitions and two SCCB transition consumers. The consumers networked with other consumers, learned job seeking skills, and participated in sessions to build their soft skills for employability. An individual attending the Career Fair shared that he is completing his Master’s Degree in Orientation and Mobility and would be interested in relocating to South Carolina from Oklahoma.

SCCB and Successful Transitions will host two camps at the University of South Carolina Capstone facility during July. Eleven students are scheduled for the first week and 15 for the second week.

The USC Upstate Orientation and Mobility program led by Dr. Tina Herzberg is scheduled to begin this Fall. SCCB will have the opportunity to be present at all job fairs and speak with consumers about employment possibilities and internships.

Twenty-nine transition age consumers attended the Summer Teen Program. Three consumers registered for a virtual option planned for two days each week focusing on financial literacy and real-life budgeting. Week one of the in-person program was led by Dr. Tina Herzberg, a professor and coordinator of the Visual Impairment Education Program at the University of South Carolina Upstate; Mary Robbins, a teacher of the Visually Impaired at the SC School for the Deaf and Blind; and Water Viz Founder Dr. Lindsey Rustad, Director of the USDA Northeast Climate Hub. The program educated consumers on components of the water cycle process. In week two (the favorite of the consumers), STRIVE4YOU, a company owned and operated by individuals who are blind or visually impaired, covered self-advocacy and self-defense. Week three offered career exploration in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), conducted by Dr. Thomas Madura and Dr. Carol Christian. Consumers built 3D printers and made several items. Evening programs and activities were offered in collaboration with Successful Transitions. The SC State Museum Planetarium’s first accessible tour led to SCCB providing accessibility materials to the museum for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Miriam Lozneanu, a deaf/blind consumer who is employed as a computer programmer, spoke with the teens about learning sign language, attending college, and how she got her job. Several students commented that it was inspirational meeting her.

Nine Summer Teen consumers participated in internships with Gardner’s Outpost, Saluda Shoals Park, SC Talking Book Services, Able SC, University of South Carolina School of Medicine and Behavioral Sciences, and Legislative Services at the South Carolina State House.

The agency is exploring the possibility of piloting a program for locally based “as needed” drivers in the Conway area to increase efficiency in serving consumers.

**Quality Assurance Update**

Michael Daniels reported:

In Quarter 4, numbers improved or held steady across all programs. Due to targeted training for new staff, there was an increase in the percentage of eye reports in AWARE for Older Blind consumers. There was a notable increase in the percentage of VR consumers determined eligible and receiving eligibility letters within 60 days as well as securing the necessary documentation to include eye reports for all consumer programs.

QA launched an initiative to boost response rates for consumer satisfaction surveys by calling those who did not respond to the emailed survey, resulting in an increased response rate and satisfaction rate per program.

The average wage for consumers entering competitive integrated employment increased from $16.87 per hour in Quarter 3 to $17.13 per hour in Quarter 4. The highest hourly wage was $50.00 per hour for a church counselor. Types of jobs obtained by consumers included market research analyst, computer and information systems manager, family and school social workers, machinist, training and development managers, clergy, and kindergarten teacher.

Some of the business’ consumers obtained employment with included Blue Cross/Blue Shield, UPS, National Federation of the Blind, Winthrop University, and school districts in Anderson, Darlington, and Horry County.

**BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM UPDATE**

Ryan Skinner reported:

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) has submitted everything required regarding the Marine Base at Paris Island and is waiting on a response from the federal Department of Education for guidance on the contract.

Two Blind Licensed Vendors (BLVs) were awarded the Fort Jackson contract, but due to an evidentiary hearing, a re-bid will be required. The Fort Jackson contract exceeds $40 million dollars, split between a teaming partner and the BLVs. After questions regarding seniority, scoring the re-bid was put on hold, a new BLV Committee Chairperson was elected, and a sub-committee formed for Fort Jackson. BEP is working with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the sub-committee on the re-bid process. According to Chapter 18 in the South Carolina Code of Regulations, a point value for seniority would result in one point for each year as a BLV, with a maximum of 10 points. Everyone agreed with this change. Chapter 18 is taught in the BLV classes at SCCB. Commissioner Graham added that the operation of the Fort Jackson contract is the responsibility of the BLV and the teaming partner while managing the contract is the responsibility of the agency. SCCB is the contract holder and all money flows through the agency. Because the money flows through the state of South Carolina and SCCB the state earns interest on the money. Ms. Olker asked where a copy of the policies could be found. Mr. Skinner replied that in the past policies were written into Chapter 18 regulations. This was shared with the body of BLVs in multiple ways. The Chapter 18 regulations have not been updated since the 1980s. Commissioner Graham will have to address the regulations with the legislators to have any changes made. Commissioner Graham added that all SCCB policies needed to be revised into one large policy manual to cover all programs at SCCB.

BEP has purchased approximately 152 new snack vending machines in FY 23 and plans to purchase an additional 150 in FY 24.

The BEP Lead position has been posted and interviews are being scheduled.

A Micro market offers self-service grab and go items (coolers have fresh food items such as pre-packaged sandwiches, salads, and beverages). Freezers hold frozen items to be microwaved. Accessible self-service kiosks that are ADA approved would be installed.

Once the Fort Jackson re-bid is completed the cafeteria will be reopened as a micro market and grill.

# Old Business

None.

# New Business

Vice Chairperson John appointed Cathy Olker to chair a nominations committee comprised of Erica James and Ron Coleman. The nominations committee will recommend nominations for new officers at the next Board Meeting.

Vice Chairperson John led a discussion concerning the frequency and time of future Board meetings. A motion was made by Erica James to have meetings bi-monthly at 11:00 am on the fourth Tuesday. The motion was seconded by Cathy Olker. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Executive Session

Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, Commissioner Graham’s evaluation. A motion was made by Cathy Olker and seconded by Erica Jenkins. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chairperson John stated that the members were out of Executive Session. No votes were taken during Executive Session.

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

September 26, 2023

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Vice Chairperson John called for a motion to adjourn at 5:57 pm. A motion was made by Cathy Olker and seconded by Erica James. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.