South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes   
April 26, 2022

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

# Call to Order

Chairperson Johnson called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. The meeting was conducted in person and via Zoom Meeting software.

# Present

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson  
Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson  
Mary Sonksen, Secretary   
Susan John  
Cathy Olker  
Darline Graham, Commissioner

# Adoption of Agenda

Mary Sonksen made a motion to accept the April 26, 2022, Agenda. It was seconded by Peter Smith. Cathy Olker asked if the Board would hear from Business Services today and Commissioner Graham replied that she would provide an update. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Approval of Minutes

Susan John made a motion to approve the March 29, 2022, minutes. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

Capital Projects – The agency is working with Real Property Services and a potential new office location in Charleston has been identified that has ample space, a bus stop in the parking lot, and is accessible. Flooding occurred in Building C at the Columbia Campus on April 4 due to heavy rains. Several staff, including senior managers, helped contain and clean up the water, preventing serious damage. Consumers were in class at the time and were taken to a hotel that evening. Repairs have been made and the facility reopened after one week. The campus handrails project is finished; the new handrails look and function excellently. Other facility needs will be identified and added to a comprehensive improvement plan that will prioritize projects for the next five to ten years.

Business Services – Duties were shifted so that Elaine Robertson can assist Ryan Skinner as Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Lead. All BEP staff will be trained to use a new module for BEP in AWARE. Transition to new blind licensed vendors at Fort Jackson is proceeding according to the timeline.

Legislative – The Senate Finance Committee approved the agency’s budget request which included $127,000 and one FTE position for Children’s Services and $466,000 and three FTEs for Prevention Services.

Several staff attended the CSAVR Spring Virtual Conference. Several states shared that they are struggling with some of the same hiring and retention issues SCCB faces. RSA has encouraged states to increase salaries if sustainable and allowed by state regulations.

Human Resources – New hires included Taylor Cornelius, Prevention of Blindness Coordinator; DeAndre Mobley, Administrative Assistant in Rock Hill; Brian Days, Counselor in Florence; and two drivers, Prince Brown and Doug Nagle.

Senior Camp – The National Federation of the Blind hosts a Senior Camp twice a year at Rocky Bottom in Pickens County. Activities will include orientation and mobility and home management instruction, daily peer support discussions, and a trip to the Asheville Farmer’s Market. In response to a question from Dr. Johnson, Commissioner Graham said there were about 24 participants, aged 55 to 90 plus.

Quality Assurance (QA) – Over the past two years, QA has helped identify areas where the agency is doing well and where there is room for improvement. QA will begin helping develop plans to implement identified improvements.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget - The agency is 75% through the State Fiscal Year. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has utilized 54% of the budget, the Training Center 71%, Transition Services 63%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 74%, Prevention of Blindness 30%, Older Blind 82%, Children’s Services 78%, and Administration 64%. Agency spending is on track at 67%. The agency was beginning to prepare for closing out the state fiscal year.

Federal Grants – The 2020 Federal grant was closed out. The agency is 75% of the way through the two-year Period of Performance for the 2021 Federal grant. The VR grant is 45% expended, the Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of the grant is 99% expended, the Older Blind grant is 96% expended, and the Supported Employment grants are 2% expended. The agency is preparing to close out the 2021 grant and begin spending the 2022 Federal Fiscal Year grant and meet requirements to carry that grant over to a second year.

Capital Improvement Projects – A vendor was identified to assist with the design and approval process for the Capital Complex canteen renovations. Columbia Campus perimeter lights were replaced with LED lights and campus interior lights were upgraded to LEDs. The generator for the Generator Replacement project will not be delivered until May 1, 2023. In the meantime, wiring for the generator and other campus upgrades would be made in preparation for its arrival. The Campus Site improvement project will improve landscaping, parking, and traffic flow and incorporate input from the Staff Advisory Council. Building A renovations would bring restrooms into full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Dr. Johnson asked if the plans would be available to the Board and Mr. Daugherty replied that once plans were more fully developed, they would be presented for the Board’s input. Equipment was ordered for the HVAC Replacement project; the boiler and chiller would arrive at approximately the same time as the generator.

Office Relocation – In Rock Hill, the agency is waiting on approval of the fit (construction to be done) before signing a lease. Expected completion is in June.

Information Technology – A new data support position will be posted. New software was added to AWARE for Quality Assurance and to replace legacy BEP software. Network servers will be moved in-house from DOA. Dr. Johnson asked if this would save the agency money and Mr. Daugherty replied yes.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

Out of 16 management/program manager positions, there are two vacancies. One separation occurred in March, the VR Training Center Director. Seven of 26 counselor positions are vacant. An offer was made for a counselor in Florence. Susan John asked about requirements for the counselor position. Mr. Mendoza said that minimum qualifications include a Master’s in Social Work or related degree, but the agency was exploring options of hiring bachelor-level candidates. Peter Smith suggested the agency consider hiring candidates currently working on a master’s degree. Cathy Olker asked if the agency could assist candidates or staff with achieving their master’s degree. Mr. Mendoza said that option was available internally and could be used when considering student candidates. Dr. Johnson noted other agencies assist staff with paying for degrees, but that staff must stay at that agency a certain number of years. Mr. Mendoza replied that SCCB also offers this option. Cathy Olker inquired about the counselor position in Oconee-Pickens and Mr. Mendoza said that interviews were still being conducted.

One Administrative Assistant was hired and there are two vacancies. There are five Training Center vacancies; one offer was made and there was one separation. That position was reclassified as a LPN; interviews for it would begin soon.

Dr. Johnson asked when the attorney position would be posted. Mr. Mendoza said the process was slow due to approval from the Attorney General’s Office. Mr. Daugherty added that the attorney was a state funded administrative position and the agency wanted to ensure funds would not be overallocated.

A rapid hiring event was held and attended by five people, two of whom were hired as drivers. Interviews will soon begin for Summer Internships that run from May 17 - August 17. Interns will also assist with the Summer Teen Program.

An Employee Service Recognition event was held, attended by 34 staff, including supervisors. Employees shared stories about their years of state service and feedback from the event was positive. An Employee Appreciation event will take place on May 20. Staff will come to Columbia to participate. Dr. Johnson stated that she would like to attend to thank employees on behalf of the Board.

A four-day Supervisor Training would begin tomorrow, and Equal Opportunity Diversity Training would soon occur.

# **Program Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

Consumer Services – Referrals in all programs except Children’s Services are up compared to the previous quarter (324 versus 281) a reflection of coming out of COVID, having new regional directors, and vacancies filled by Human Resources.

Residential Program – There are 14 residential and 11 day students. Flooding due to rain closed the facility for one week. During that time, new drivers were hired, and staff reevaluated practices to improve efficiency. Donna Earley and Melissa Young were recognized for standardizing day student schedules and placing them in additional classes in which they needed training. This also resulted in more efficient use of instructors.

Summer Teen – Packets for enrollment have been distributed and counselors are discussing the program with parents, consumers, and teachers of students with visual impairments. The application deadline is May 13. There is a plan to incorporate some virtual options for consumers who cannot attend or are uncomfortable attending in person. In response to a question from Susan John, Ms. Marshall explained that the program was four weeks long, from June 6 to July 1. The first week would focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), while the next three weeks would be the independence and worker tracts.

Student Internship Program – Due to changes in staff roles and responsibilities, the program is smaller than last year, with three participants. SCCB employment consultants are currently exploring internship opportunities for the participants in their local communities.

Training – VR counselors participated in a one-day, in-person training on vocational assessment and interest inventories. Counselors will begin conducting interest inventories on new cases, which will help improve determining vocational objectives for consumers. If a consumer needs additional assessments, they will be referred to the vocational evaluator. Another training covered eligibility requirements beyond the visual component. An upcoming training will focus on counseling and guidance.

Staff Advisory Council – Comprised of blind and visually impaired staff, Ms. Marshall, and Luis Mendoza, their first meeting was held April 8. Participants suggested that they be involved in developing sensitivity training for new employees. They also identified accessibility issues with local office phones. Their feedback will also be incorporated into campus landscaping updates.

# Quality Assurance Updates

## Mike Daniels reported:

Employer Satisfaction Survey, Quarter 2 – Consumers in the Bridge (Building Readiness for Individualized Development of Gainful Employment) program contacted 102 employers by phone. In response to Dr. Johnson, Mr. Daniels clarified that these were employers who have hired SCCB consumers. Twenty-five percent of those contacted responded. Susan John asked if the 4.2% responses to one survey question reflected only one respondent, to which Mr. Daniels replied yes. Some highlights from the report were that employers overall experience with SCCB was 91% positive, communication regarding services was 80% positive, and 88% of employers felt they could contact SCCB in the future for assistance.

Data Validation Report, Quarter 3 – This report audited of 228 VR cases in AWARE, the agency’s content management system, helping to identify data that may not be in the system and cases out of compliance with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) policy and guidance (such as cases in application status for 60 or more days or in referral status for 90 or more days). Results from this report have trended up for the last five quarters. This data validation also informs the RSA 911 Data Validation Report.

Dr. Johnson commented that she liked the format of the Quarter 1 Report as it incorporated more information on each major service offered by the agency. Mr. Daniels replied that information would be included on future reports.

Consumer Employment – In Quarter 2, 38 consumers were employed with an average hourly wage of $19.77 at an average of 35 hours per week. Of the top ten jobs gained by consumers, number one was a Food Services Manager earning $72.12 per hour. In Quarter 3, 34 consumers were employed with an average hourly wage of $16.71 at an average of 35 hours per week. Of the top ten jobs gained by consumers, number one was in Property and Real Estate earning $54.95 per hour (a self-employed individual).

Mr. Daniels noted that information from QA reports helps identify performance gaps, identify areas for staff training, address compliance issues, and that QA will follow up on issues identified to ensure accountability.

# Old Business

None

# New Business

None

# Public Comment

None

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

May 24, 2022  
June 28, 2022

The meetings will be held in-person and via Zoom Meeting Software at 11:00 am in the Building D conference room.

# Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to adjourn at 12:25 pm. A motion was made by Mary Sonksen and seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Signatures

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Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

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Mary Sonksen, Secretary

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