South Carolina Commission for the Blind  
1430 Confederate Avenue  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes  
August 18, 2021

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

Call to Order

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

Present  
  
Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson  
Peter Smith, Vice Chairperson  
Mary Sonksen, Secretary   
Susan John  
Darline Graham, Commissioner  
  
Adoption of Agenda

Peter Smith made a motion to accept the August 18, 2021 Agenda. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

What progress is being made to reopen Low Vision Clinics?

Rhonda Thompson responded that the Columbia Low Vision Clinic is serving a limited number of consumers, with two clinics being held each month. The Charleston Low Vision Clinic would begin serving consumers on September 16, 2021, and the Greenville Low Vision Clinic would begin serving consumers in September, at a date to be determined. Consumers would have to provide their own transportation until further notice.

Approval of Minutes

Mary Sonksen made a motion to approve the July 21, 2021 minutes. It was seconded by Peter Smith. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

The July 21, 2021 minutes were amended to reflect that four vacant VRC positions remained. In the Executive Session section, the words “as presented” were changed to “as approved” for clarification.

Susan John made a motion to approve the changes to the July 21, 2021 minutes. The motion was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Susan John made a motion to approve the August 3, 2021 Special Called Board Meeting minutes. It was seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Finance Report

Matt Daugherty reported:

Final Budget for State fiscal year 2021.

* The agency utilized 89% of the state fiscal year budget.
* Administration utilized 93% of its budget.
* Rehabilitation Services utilized 104% of its budget.
* Region I utilized 88% of its budget.
* Region II utilized 110% of its budget.
* Region III utilized 103% of its budget.
* Business Enterprise Program (BEP) utilized 97% of its budget.
* Training and Employment utilized 85% of its budget.
* Training Center utilized 60% of its budget.
* Prevention of Blindness utilized 26% of its budget.
* Older Blind utilized 89% of its budget.
* Children’s Services utilized 98% of its budget.
* Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) utilized 104% of the required 15% for the 2020 grant.
* 100% of the Independent Living for Older Blind grant for 2020 had been utilized.
* The agency utilized 51% of the 2020 Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) grant, which included receipt of a $1 million re-allotment.

Budget for the period ending July 31, 2021.

* The agency utilized 8% of the state fiscal year budget.
* Administration utilized 10% of its budget.
* Rehabilitation Services utilized 6% of its budget. State VR and District offices are included in this line item.
* Training Center utilized 9% of its budget. Training Center and Training and Employment are included in this line item.
* Transition utilized 2% of its budget.
* Business Enterprise Program (BEP) utilized 19% of its budget.
* Prevention of Blindness utilized 3% of its budget.
* Older Blind utilized 9% of its budget.
* Children’s Services utilized 8% of its budget.
* Pre-ETS utilized 10% of the required 15% for the 2021 grant.
* The $5.1 million for the HVAC system was not included at this time.

A motion was made by Peter Smith to approve the financial report for state fiscal year 2021 and seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Mary Sonksen to approve the financial report for the period ending July 31, 2021 and seconded by Peter Smith. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Human Resources Report**

Luis Mendoza reported:

* There were no separations and three new hires.
* Five vacancies for management staff were added to the HR Report.
* Four Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions remained opened:
  + The Conway VRC position was being advertised.
  + The Charleston VRC will start September 2, 2021.
  + The Deaf-Blind Counselor job duties were under review and will be advertised as a Deaf Blind/Bilingual Coordinator.
  + The Greenwood VRC position was pending based on reorganization.
* The training coordinator, Mental Health Counselor, and Woodshop instructor positions remained open.
* The vacant O&M position description was under review.
* The O&M Lead position was pending advertisement.
* The Braille Instructor position description was under review.
* The Education Instructor position description was pending reclassification based on reorganization.
* The Region IV Director position was pending State Office of Human Resources approval.

Commissioner’s Report

Darline Graham reported:

* The Commissioner and Luis Mendoza traveled to the Conway and Florence offices to visit staff, receive feedback, and to observe new office space since the recent moves. Conway and Florence are safe, have sufficient room, accessible, and ample parking.
* Mike Daniels organized a session for himself, Commissioner Graham, and Cara Jackson to attend on Beekeeping offered by the Clemson University Extension in Lexington. The agency hopes to establish a partnership that will provide work experience opportunities for consumers to build equipment used in this industry, such as wooden boxes, frames, and other items that could be built and assembled in a woodshop class providing training opportunities for our consumers.
* A group of agency staff traveled to Rocky Bottom Retreat and Conference Center for the Summer Teen graduation ceremony. Staff met students and parents and heard first-hand how much they enjoyed the program. Students shared wonderful comments about their counselors and how much they learned through this experience.
* The Commissioner attended, via Zoom, the Governor’s Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities annual awards event. Several business partners shared how much they benefited from hiring trained, qualified individuals with disabilities.
  + Conduent, a SCCB business partner, was recognized for hiring 12 SC Commission for the Blind (SCCB) consumers into customer service call center jobs. Conduent commented on the value of the partnership with SCCB.
  + Consumers were trained through the Building Readiness for Individualized Development of Gainful Employment (BRIDGE) training program. The program would be beneficial to consumers and business partners.
* The Commissioner attended the closing ceremony for the Summer Internship Program (SIP).
  + One young intern shared his experience in researching murder investigations with the Richland County Public Defender’s office and how it helped him with making future career decisions.
* The Commissioner met with the Blind Licensed Vendors (BLVs) Committee to discuss the current challenges due to the pandemic and limited public visitation in prisons that affect the income potential from vending machines.
  + Points of contact were discussed to improve communication at each facility and allow the BLV to be better informed of each facilities’ visitation schedule.
* The Commissioner and several staff attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation quarterly call that presented a new resource guide that would help counselors assist consumers who are interested in starting their own business. The guide provided tools for developing a business plan and those interested in self-employment.
  + The National Labor exchange, a web resource, would help counselors explore job opportunities around the state and nation.
  + These resources would be provided on the intranet. The intranet has become a useful tool for new and current employees to access trainings and other information at any time.
* The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) accepted the agency’s Corrective Action Plan, which was developed as a result of the agency’s Monitoring report.
  + The first quarterly progress report will be due to RSA on January 31, 2022.
* Meetings were held with Senior Managers to discuss the restructure and salary adjustment plan. An agency wide meeting would be held to introduce the plan to all staff.
* The Commissioner will meet with Senior Managers to work on the Strategic Plan and the Accountability Report. The report will be due to the Department of Administration (DOA) next month.
  + The reports will be presented to the SCCB Board of Commissioners for review and approval prior to being sent to DOA.
* The Commissioner would attend the National Federation of the Blind state convention on August 29-30, 2021.

VR and Summer Teen Program Update

Karma Marshall reported:

* The 2021 Summer Teen Program included virtual components and in-person services. SCCB and Successful Transitions used Center for Disease Control (CDC) and American Camp Associations guidelines to establish a plan to safely deliver in-person services. Teens from across the state participated in a residential “camp” program that incorporated independent living skills, work readiness training, internships, and peer support.
* The Summer Teen Program began with a week of virtual services on Monday, June 21, 2021, including workshops on organizational skills in the home, financial literacy, and Zoom Etiquette.
* Twenty-three teens, representing 15 counties in the state, began the in-person Summer Teen Program in Columbia on Monday, June 28.
  + Teens were housed in six locations to allow for appropriate social distancing within the house.
  + Workshops were held at the NFB Center.
  + A field trip to Columbia Airport helped enhance independent travel skills.
  + Small group workshops were held in the six houses, allowing the teens to participate in independent living skills, household chores, safe cooking, food preparation and food cutting.
  + Self-Advocacy, Self-Defense, Financial management/budgeting, assistive technology demonstrations, and how to use Uber and other paratransit services were offered.
  + Work readiness workshops included how to talk about and disclose a disability, what is a work ethic, attitudes in the workplace, and mock interviews.
* Eight older teens that participated in past summer teen programs and demonstrated appropriate work readiness skills were placed in a work based learning experience at locations including: SC Talking Books at the State Library, Carolina Wildlife Center, Edventure Children’s Museum, First Baptist Church of Gilbert, and Columbia Downtown YMCA.
  + Stipends were given to teens participating in the Work Readiness Program.
  + While the purpose for the program was to support teens in preparation for their educational and vocational goals, there was plenty of time for fun. Evening activities included game nights, movie nights, a visit to Frankie’s Fun Park, and a water activity night that offered multiple inflatables.
* Participants demonstrated an array of abilities and confidence in a talent show.
* The final week was held at Rock Bottom Retreat and Conference Center located in Pickens county:
  + Teens had individual rooms for social distancing.
  + Teens had opportunities to enjoy the pool, firepit in the evening, and kayaking.
  + During graduation, several teens shared reflections on the positive impact of their Summer Teen and work based learning experiences.
  + Jennifer Bazer, President of Successful Transitions, Transition Counselors, and the employer partners that provided internship opportunities were recognized.
* The Student Internship Program (SIP) began in 2008 as a pilot program and is managed through the Training and Employment Division. It gives students in-depth, hands-on, practical work experience while preparing them for employment in their area of study. It is for students currently attending a two or a four-year college program, or a recent graduate (within 12 months).
  + Students must have a minimum 2.5 GPA.
  + Applicants are interviewed by SCCB Employment Consultants, VR Counselors and Regional Directors.
  + Selected consumers attended an Orientation program to review expectations for professional behavior, soft skills, and discuss professional dress.
  + The 2021 SIP interns represented a wide range of career and academic interests that included Computer Science, Psychology, Early Childhood Education, Piano/Music Education, and Political Science.
  + Colleges represented included Bob Jones University, USC Columbia, USC Aiken, South University, and Piedmont Technical College.
  + Employer partners that provided internship opportunities were Orangeburg County DDSN, ABC Academy Childcare, The Courage Center for Recovery, Freeway Music, Richland County Public Defender’s Office, and SCCB.
  + A Graduation Ceremony for the SIP participants was held on August 13, 2021:
  + Participants shared reflections of their experiences.
  + Several consumers were able to take knowledge learned in the classroom and apply it in the real world of work.
  + Consumers earned a training stipend upon completion of the 8-week (120 hours) program.
  + SIP demonstrates how collaboration between SCCB staff and community partners results in opportunities for consumers.
  + Five of the six consumers participating in SIP previously attended the SCCB Summer Teen Program.
  + Enrollment in one SCCB program can establish the foundation for other SCCB programs and result in the consumer achieving their vocational and career goals.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Public Comment

* The following questions/comments were made:
  + Very proud of the SCCB Summer Teen Program and the partnership formed with Successful Transitions.
  + Will Board meetings still have a virtual component once the in-person meetings begin? The Commissioner responded by stating yes.

**Executive Session**  
Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Peter Smith.  
  
Chairperson Johnson reported no votes were taken during Executive Session.

A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Peter Smith to approve the Agency Head planning document. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to adjourn at 1:59 pm. A motion was made by Peter Smith and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Future Board Meeting Schedule

September 28, 2021  
The meeting will be held via Zoom beginning at 11:00 am.

A request was made to move future board meetings to the fourth Tuesday in each month beginning at 11:00 am. A written document would be presented at the September 28, meeting for review and a vote.

Signatures

Dr. Judy Johnson, Chairperson

Mary Sonksen, Secretary  
  
  
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Date