South Carolina Commission for the Blind

1430 Confederate Avenue
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Meeting Minutes
March 29, 2022

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 11:04 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

Cathy Olker made a motion to accept the March 29, 2022, Agenda. It was seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Public Comment

None

# Approval of Minutes

Cathy Olker made a motion to approve the February 22, 2022, minutes. It was seconded by Susan John. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

# Commissioner’s Report

## Darline Graham reported:

On February 28, Matt Daugherty, Karma Marshall and Commissioner Graham participated in an all-day House Legislative Oversight Committee Meeting about South Carolina’s Education and Workforce Development Pipeline and how agencies work together to serve jobseekers and businesses.

The agency presented its budget request to the Senate Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee on March 2, 2022, requesting $127,000 for Children’s Services and $466,000 for Prevention Services. These requests have been approved in both the Executive and House budget proposals.

Bill S430 was signed by the Governor and became effective on March 14. This law states that SCCB’s Board shall meet at least once a year and that the Chairperson may call meetings as needed. This replaces the requirement for the Board to hold monthly meetings.

Commissioner Graham provided an agency overview at the Annual SC Vision Summit, held virtually on March 4. Several staff attended sessions on serving individuals who are deaf-blind and eligibility criteria for transition students.

A partnership with Nephron Pharmaceuticals will provide additional training opportunities for consumers. Michelle Whetstone of Nephron Pharmaceuticals met with staff and consumers to explain the company’s needs. Ben Powell, Apiculture and Pollinator Program Coordinator for Clemson University Extension, also met with staff to discuss a partnership involving the assembly of beekeeping equipment. This will provide additional training for consumers in the Training Center and may lead to job shadow opportunities.

An advisory council composed of SCCB employees who are blind or visually impaired is being created. Their personal and professional insights will help improve communication and service delivery to better meet consumer’s needs.

Staff has begun planning the next Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, which is required at least every 3 years (under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

In April, several staff will attend the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation’s Virtual Spring conference, which provides information and best practices on improving VR program performance and fiscal management.

The agency’s next strategic planning meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 1.

# Finance Report

## Matt Daugherty reported:

State Budget - The agency is 67% through the State Fiscal Year. Vocational Rehabilitation has utilized 43% of the budget, the Training Center 56%, Transition Services 61%, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) 72%, Prevention of Blindness 26%, Older Blind 69%, Children’s Services 68%, and Administration 71%. Agency spending is on track at 61%.

Federal Grants - The agency is in the carry-over year for the 2021 Federal grant and 71% of the way through the total Period of Performance. The Vocational Rehabilitation grant is 37% expended, the Pre-Employment Transition Services portion of the grant is 99% expended, the Older Blind grant is 95% expended, and the Supported Employment grants are 2% expended. The agency is starting to spend the 2022 Federal Fiscal Year VR grant and working to meet requirements to carry that grant over to a second year.

Capital Improvement Projects - The Campus Handrails project is slightly behind due to needed inspections but should be completed soon. The Capital Complex canteen renovations are in the design phase. The Generator Replacement project is in the pre-construction phase, but equipment is not expected to arrive until May 2023. The Campus Landscaping and Site Improvement project and the HVAC Replacement project are in the final design phase.

Office Relocations – Sites have been selected for relocation of the Charleston and Rock Hill offices.

Information Technology - Work is proceeding on an interface between the Case Management System and the state’s financial system to automate payment of case service invoices and reduce workload.

# Human Resources Report

## Luis Mendoza reported:

Out of 16 management/program manager positions, there is one vacancy, which is the new attorney position. The agency is awaiting approval to post the position, which should occur before the end of the current state fiscal year. There were three new Counselor vacancies in February. An offer for the Florence counselor position will be made soon. There are three vacant Administrative Assistant positions. There is a pending offer for the Greenville Administrative Assistant position, the Rock Hill Administrative Assistant position was filled on March 17, 2022, and the Charleston administrative assistant position is currently being advertised. Training Center Vacancies remain at four.

Human Resources staff attended a career fair at Georgia Southern and plans to attend a career fair in Greenville and Sumter in the coming weeks.

Internship opportunities will be posted to advertise for summer interns. One purpose of the Internship program is to establish connections with students and universities. Interns will also assist with the Summer Teen program.

The agency’s first rapid hiring event will be held on Friday, April 1, to hire drivers and residential facility assistants for the Training Center.

# **Program Services Update**

## Karma Marshall reported:

A “Functional Assessment Week” was held at the Training Center the week of March 7. Fourteen residential students and 11 day students are receiving Adjustment to Blindness training, Assistive Technology Training, and BEP Training. Seven consumers are participating in Fundamental Skills/Work Readiness Training as part of the agency’s partnership with Nephron Pharmaceuticals. Donna Earley was recognized for her assistance with scheduling consumers, meals, and providing guidance on transportation. The instructors, drivers, Crystal Garcia, and Melissa Young were thanked for their hard work.

A Summer Teen informational flyer and application/information packets were created by Mark Gamble with input from the Transition Team. Consumers are being contacted and packets sent to homes and TVIs. Several blind speakers are scheduled to present during the Summer Teen program. Additional programming will be developed in partnership with Successful Transitions. In preparation for the STEM portion of Summer Teen, VR Program Lead Niki Outen, Dr. Tina Herzberg of the USC Upstate TVI (Teacher of students with Visual Impairments) Education program, and TVIs Lauren Beckham and Mary Robbins attended the STEM training workshop at Washington State School for the Blind.

The Summer Internship Program (SIP) provides an 8-week paid internship opportunity for college students in two- or four-year degree programs. Employment Consultants are developing SIP interview questions and the SIP selection committee.

# Business Services Updates

## Ryan Skinner reported:

The agency has begun a partnership with Nephron Pharmaceuticals in Columbia. Consumers in the Training Center are assembling syringe boxes as part of their training, which are then delivered to Nephron. In addition to helping staff improve evaluation and assessment, consumers will be able to develop skills needed to become competitively employed. Consumers may also receive other training and employment opportunities at Nephron.

The Florence-Conway area Employment Consultant position will soon be posted, and interviews conducted for the BEP Consultant position in Greenville.

The Blind Licensed Vendor operating the Fort Jackson contract will retire at the end of June. The notice for BLVs to apply for the opportunity to operate this facility was posted on the bid line last month. Fifteen BLVs applied and interviews are currently in process. The assistance of Elaine Robertson and the active participation of the Committee of Blind Vendors in overhauling the bid selection and interviewing processes was noted.

The campus cafeteria will soon be listed on the bid line.

The Annual Meeting of Blind Licensed Vendors will be held May 13-14. Consumers in the BEP program or who are receiving on-the-job training may also attend.

A volunteer found through the Veteran Readiness and Employment program will begin on-the-job training with the BEP on April 1.

# Old Business

None

# New Business

Chairperson Johnson reminded Board Commissioners to complete the Statement of Economic Interests by the end of the month. Chairperson Johnson also requested that the Board hear from Quality Assurance quarterly.

# Public Comment

None

# Executive Session

Chairperson Johnson called for a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss a contract update. A motion was made by Susan John and seconded by Mary Sonksen. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

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

# Future Board Meeting Schedule

April 26, 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 12:37 pm. A motion was made by Peter Smith and seconded by Mary Sonksen. 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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