**Business Enterprise Program Quarterly Committee Meeting**

**Date:** Friday October 27, 2023

**Time:** 1:05pm

**Location:** 1430 Confederate Ave. Columbia, SC 29202 (The Commission for the Blind)

**Call To Order**

Prayer

**Committee of Blind Vendors Roll Call**

Karen Jones Char; Tiffany Mitchel Vice Chair; Kevin Carney Florence District Representative; George Martin Greenville, Anderson, Spartanburg District Representative; Lonnie Hart Columbia 1 District Representative; M Lawrence Secretary

**Gallery Attendees:** Willie Patrick;

**Zoom Attendees**: Princetta Goodwin; Kevin Skinner; Beverly Anderson; Onita Fletcher; Mary Peters; Roger Webb; Harold Anderson; Olivia Anderson; Janice Smith; Vincent Downing; Sophia Sparks; Belinda Banks; Ruth Paramour; Alfred Shaw

**Reading and Approval of Minutes**: Reading of Minutes Approved

Carrie Morris gives us the financial report for the 2nd quarter & 3rd quarter of calendar year 2023.

**BEP Updates**: Ryan Skinner Director:

We are participating in Active Participation with the BEP Committee to the fullest extent that we can and are working with are partners NFB (Nation Federation for the Blind) & NABM (National Association of Blind Merchants) for guidance on Active Participation.

Our Staff is at full strength at this time.

New BEP Lead Lisa Hall. Lisa has experience with people with disabilities, workforce development, training, eventually Lisa will be our Trainer for the Business Enterprise Program.

Thomas Smith Attorney for the SLA has resigned and taken another role on a federal level

David Lyon is our Interim General Counsel and is assisting us in current matters.

**Calling Posts:** This is a tool that the Business Enterprise Program uses to get information out to all Blind Licensed Vendors and Staff in a timely manner. The service uses a 405-area code from Ohio so this calling post may come up as an out of state number on your phone. It will leave a message if you do not answer, that is if you do not have a call blocking feature enabled on your phone. We want to make sure all BLV’s are receiving these calling posts. If you anyone is having problems, please speak with Jaqueline @ 803-898-7356.

Please have patience with getting new vending machines purchased in a timely manner, we are working diligently.

We are working with the BEP Committee in putting priority stands on the bid line through Active Participation. We are prioritizing these stands according to emergency situations etc.

SLA is working on trying to actively participate in events to better be involved in our program and with our BLV’s Brian & Emily were able to attend NAMA in the spring; Cameron attended ACE in October; Angela & Kim attended Blast in New Jersey.

We are still working on Refund situations for our rest areas and welcome centers. We are working on an 1-800 number to put on a sign that will be mounted on each gate. We are hoping this will be successful. This gives the ability to streamline.

We are also working on placing gates at our outside shelters, rest areas, and welcome centers.

Fort Jackson: We want to clarify that due to the litigation decisions have been made by internal grievances, and we are guided to what we can and can not do through counsel. We are going to begin looking at our scheduling, as you know with Chapter 18, we must schedule 5 individuals to participate as panelists; we do intend on making phone calls in the next couple of weeks to begin scheduling those, and we will try to schedule these as close together as possible. We are going to move forward with what we can to the extent we can until the point we can’t.

**Consultants District Reports:**

Angela Galloway Florence District: Angela has been ordering machines for her district and is expecting to receive 15 new vending machines in the next six weeks.

Kim Spears Charleston District: Kim would like to than her district for their patience while she is in the process of ordering and replacing new machines in the Charleston district; Stand # 14 McDougal Institution went out for bid but did not receive any applicants and we will continue to keep the stand moving without ceasing.

Cameron Lark Greenville District: Cameron is continuing to work on replacing machines in his district and any issues; Cameron attended the ACE Conference in Myrtle Beach SC and met many people face to face.

Emily Cato District #1 Columbia; Emily is also working with all of her vendors that need machines replaced and some new machines have started arriving for her district;

Brian Green District #2 Columbia; November 7th @ 2pm with his district BLV’s; Please remember to send in “copies of receipts” and not originals for BLV’s reports; let Brian know if any BLV in his district needs new equipment.

**Questions for the SLA:**

Question: Does the SLA have a date you will being with interviews?

Answer: As soon as possible and we have already started but have no hard date. We are comfortable in saying we hope to have some interviews scheduled in the month of November.

Question: Does the SLA consider the two vendors that are currently at Fort Jackson, does the Agency consider Stand #154 their temporary stand or their permanent stand?

Answer: We were following the Practice of Precedence.

Question: So, stand #79 Joint Base Charleston are considered temporary locations of these vendors from an Agency standpoint?

Answer: We think that is a fair term.

Question: At some point is the SLA considering putting other temporary vendors in those locations until the entire process is finished?

Answer: That can be discussed. The web is complex that we are working through and there are guidelines we must follow with consideration.

Melody Marion: (Vendor’s Supply).

How to better assist Blind Licensed Vendors.

We try to work with the BLV’s one on one and try to have a good relationship.

Trends are moving to larger serving size: LSS 1.5 ounce (Larger Serving Size) The goal is to move everyone from Single Serve to LSS 1.5 ounce. Reasoning is 1.5 ounce, per ounce is less expensive making it more of a bargain. A better bang for your buck or greater profit margin.

At this time, we also would like for BLV’s to move towards XVL (Extra Value).

Vendor’s Supply is no longer selling the 1- 0unce bags of chips, for example Herr’s. All 1-ounce bags are being converted to 1,5-ounce bags.

New items:

A 1-ounce pepperoni snack stick from Hormel @ 55 cents to 6o cents per unit.

Skippy Peanut Butter Bites 6-ounce bag plus 1,5 ounces for vending or canteen location.

Raisels that are fruit juice infused @ 40 to 50 cents for vending or canteen locations.

Carley’s Single Tray cookies @ 64 cents unit price.

It will help Vender’s Supply when any BLV has multiple accounts to please make sure that you let Melody know about each account you have as well as your important information under each account. We would like to give individual invoices for each vendor’s account.

Thank you, Melody.

Shaun is the area sales manager for the Oracam Camera in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia:

Who we are: This company started in 2000 as Global Eye. We began Oracam in 2015 for individuals with low vision and blindness to live fuller and more independent lives.

**Our Devices**: “My Eye” device is the size of a lipstick and self-contained within the device. This does not require internet or WiFi and a BLV can use it anywhere you are. What this device does it connect to glasses and there is a magnet in the glasses that hooks on to the glasses, and at the front of the camera. It is going to tell me what is in front of me when I point this to any object. It dictates back to me what I am looking at. This device also looks at currency as well. Most beneficial is it reads “barcodes.” There are over 2 million barcodes stored in this device. You may program a barcode into your device up to 100 of them. Face recognition is also programed into this device up to 100 faces.

Question: Can you ask it questions?

Answer: You can ask things like colors, etc. and may need WiFi in order to have this feature, and it is in the works for the future.

Question: Does it take a charge and how long

Answer: It is like your cell phone and has a magnet connector and has an hour and a half of continuous use, almost a full day.

Question: How do we receive literature about this product?

Answer: You may reach out to me directly

Question: Is there financing available?

Answer: Yes

Question: The cost?

Answer: $4,250 for the “My Eye.” A one-time discount of $500 off for The Business Enterprise Program.

The READ: This is a bigger device and a handheld device and as big as a large permanent marker and is a “point and click” device and is held like a pencil where the front of it is a camera attached. I point at anything, click and take a photo of the item, for example a book, and it began reading it back to me. This device you need to point and click. If a BLV is totally blind you may benefit mor from the “My Eye.” This device does not recognize face recognition. This device cost around $1,990.

Question: Does the $500 discount apply to this device?

Answer: No

Thank you, Shaun.

**Upward Mobility Updates**: Tiffany Mitchel is going to tell us about “Blast. Micro Markets are taking over in many locations, including State & Federal Correctional Institutions. Jen Covert was a life coach and gave us good advice for future Micro Market potential possibilities. There is a wide variety of products out there and Micro Markets are a way of providing these products to the public.

Our profit margins are a concern, and we cannot continue to sell products at the low price that we did a few years ago. We must not hesitate to raise our prices and progressively move forward to meet the demands of the future. Product prices have risen, and we need to raise our prices accordingly.

**Kevin Carney: “ACE” Show** in Myrtle Beach was a success @ $50 to attend for two days and your assistant is free of charge. They have seminars in the mornings and hands on learning about new products in the afternoons. They did a wonderful job marketing many products while putting them on display for BLV’s to take free of charge. They are there to show you what is trending in the market today and price point a product though Vendor’s Supply 7 Vistar, as well as offer deals if interested.

The public is asking for a variety of fresh foods and many products are moving in this direction as well.

**Closing Remarks:** ***Our attendance for our BEP Quarterly Meetings has not been acceptable. We have approximately 62 vendors in the state of South Carolina and unfortunately, we are showing a low attendance and participation for our meetings. As the BEP Committee receives many phone calls after our quarterly meetings, the committee is asking for an increase in participation, via ZOOM, if possible, please. We would like to encourage all BLV’s to attend in person in possible. It would be greatly appreciated. Please feel free to call your District Representative with any concerns.***

**ANNUAL MEETING:** We are tentatively looking at the 1st or 2nd weekend in February for our Annual Meeting. We are hoping for February 2nd and 3rd.

We will be having District Meetings in early January so please keep your BLV’s informed.

Some District Representatives will be holding Holiday Celebrations for their districts this year, and to be announced.

All District Representatives will be continuing to send messages and email BLV’s when needing to be informed.

***Karen Jones Chai, her phone number is***

Meeting Adjourns at 3:03pm Sec. M. Lawrence