MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
HELD
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2013
AT
BAINBRIDGE COLLEGE
BAINBRIDGE, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sandy Adams
Jimmy DeFoor
Marsha Farrow
Louise Hill
Greg Kirk
Amy O'Dell
Don Parks

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Robert Green
Fay Loggins

Mr. Jimmy DeFoor, Chairman, first acknowledged and thanked Kevin Kelly of the Georgia Industries for the Blind (GIB) for hosting the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board meeting. He also expressed his appreciation to Bainbridge College for the use of its beautiful facility.

Mr. DeFoor called the GVRS Board meeting to order at approximately 3:03 pm with the roll call. He further explained that the approval of the minutes is being delayed to allow Mr. Greg Schmieg to give the Executive Director's Report and slide presentation so everyone could see. After the presentation, the Board will be seated on the stage.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

VR Budget

Mr. Greg Schmieg started his report by stating, although GVRA is six months into the transition, this agency is trying to live within its means and within its budget. The federal 110 VR Grant issue was successfully resolved in mid December, which means that Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) removed the high risk condition as well as the special condition on the federal FY 2013 grant. However, GVRA could only draw down federal money for which it has matching funds.

Also, about mid December, we uncovered the rate which the VR Program was going through its client services budget. We are concerned how the VR Program is going to make it through this state fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2013.

Mr. Schmieg continued by presenting the same slide presentation that he shared with the contracted providers (see attachments).

After showing the slide presentation to the contracted providers last week, Mr. Schmieg learned that a message was circulating that VR is closing programs and not serving people.
Mr. Schmieg informed the Board that it is just not the case. Although the "Priority Categories" are closed, GVRA continues to serve individuals who have a Work Plan, and will authorize services until the funds are depleted.

The reason for making the presentation to the contracted providers was to have them help us brainstorm on ideas and shape the message. All of us have the same goal, which is assisting Georgians with disabilities achieve employment and independence.

After Mr. Schmieg's presentation, Chairman Jimmy DeFoor provided some comments. He said that with any new agency come challenges. Mr. Schmieg has handled these challenges with full transparency and inclusiveness. It is not always easy. We are going to have some struggles. We are working together to provide the best possible services to people with disabilities throughout the state.

Marsha Farrow asked is there any way to predict whether or not this agency can continue to provide services and survive through this fiscal year without having a negative impact.
Mr. Schmieg mentioned this agency cannot discriminate or use funds inappropriately. It is going to be tough.

Don Parks affirmed that there are lots of services that counselors could provide that do not cost the agency money.

Mr. Schmieg continued his report by introducing Twyla Crump, VR Field Services Director, to address the proposed VR policies. Ms. Crump recognized the team of employees who worked on the proposed policy changes. They are Paul Raymond, Director of Blind Services; Becky Sills, Director of Deaf Services; Cece Hockett, Policy Chief; Melanie Poole, Regional Director; Sharon Angel, Business Unit Manager and Terri Rushing, Legal Counsel. The reasons for the policy revisions proposal are twofold. The first is to ensure financial assistance to those who really need it. The second is to improve program cost effectiveness. Ms. Crump did a slide presentation and explained the policy recommendations (see attachments).

A motion was made by Marsha Farrow and seconded by Don Parks that the proposed policy recommendations be accepted for discussion. Several Board members asked questions or requested clarification of the proposed changes. Clarification was provided by Twyla Crump and Cece Hockett regarding the implementation date and its effect on clients' due process. Subsequently, a motion was made by Marsha Farrow and seconded by Don Parks to accept the proposed policy changes effective March 1, 2013. Mr. DeFoor asked for a vote to accept the recommendation for changes in policy regarding student services and fees. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Schmieg then requested that the Board go into Executive Session at the end of the formal meeting in order to provide an update on the hospitals at Warm Springs. After Mr. Schmieg's request, the Board was seated on the stage to continue with its meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Greg Kirk and seconded by Don Parks that the minutes of the December 12, 2012 meeting be approved. There being no questions or discussion, the motion was passed unanimously by the Board.

OLD BUSINESS

At the December 12, 2012 meeting, Mr. John Weatherford addressed the Board on behalf of the Georgia Radio Reading Service (GRRS) to request additional financial support. Mr. DeFoor requested a motion be made to discuss this request. A motion was made by Marsha Farrow and seconded by Sandy Adams to discuss this request. After the discussion, the Board voted unanimously not to approve GRRS's request for additional funds.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. DeFoor introduced Ms. Peggy Venable to present information on the Native American VR Program in Whigham, GA. Ms. Venable started her presentation by stating that the need for the American Indian Rehabilitation Program across the nation is great. One in three Native Americans has a disability, and one in seven has a severe disability. She continued by saying that the internet is helping the Native Americans to be self employed by selling their goods all over the world. The Native American VR Program has a great relationship with GVRA counselors and managers in Georgia. The Georgia Native American VR Program is used as a model to other states to show how it is involved with the State Rehabilitation Council and Statewide Independent Living Council.

Mr. DeFoor then introduced Unit Managers Marilyn Mason and Valerie Moore to give their presentations for Region 10. Region 10 is located in the Southwest corner of the state and covers 14 counties. The four office connected with Region 10 are the Regional Office, Albany Unit, Bainbridge Unit and the Thomasville Unit. Ms. Mason and Ms. Moore gave an overview of their partnerships as well as working relationships with the Native American VR Program, the Project Search Initiative and the Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center in Dothan, Alabama.

Mr. DeFoor thanked Ms. Marilyn Mason and Ms. Valerie Moore for their presentations to inform the Board of how people with disabilities are served in the Albany region.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No requests for public comment were received.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. DeFoor stated the GVRS Board will reconvene for an Executive Session after a 15 minutes break. Mr. DeFoor thanked the audience for being a part of the Board meeting.

There being no further public business for discussion, the Board meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:35 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday, February 13, 2013 in Warm Springs, GA.

Marsha Farrow, Secretary

APPROVED:

Jimmy DeFoor, Chair