**Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Council**

**May 6, 2020**

**Meeting Minutes**

Council Members in Attendance: Carolyn Peters, Th.D., Chair, Andrea Kramer, David Baker, Alison McKay, Margie Hegg, Jane Gerhardt, Jeremy Morris, John Moore, Matthew Sauer, Ph.D., Vice-chair, Karis Spence, jw Smith, Ph.D, Kevin Miller, Carl LoParo, Lisa Hickman, Pete Moore, Shauna Dowdy

OOD Staff: Assistant Executive Director Erik Williamson, Employer and Innovation Services Deputy Director Kristen Ballinger, Chief Legal Counsel Matt Lampke, Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired Deputy Director Greg Dormer, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Deputy Director Susan Pugh, Chief Information Officer Michelle Burk, Legislative Liaison Alex Moorman, OOD Council Liaison Shirley Marchi, Chief Financial Officer Maria Seaman, Chief of Communications Kim Jump

Guests: Tanya, Interpreter, Emily Turner, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Goodwill Industries and Kelly Manns, Assistant Director, Evaluation and Training Services, Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries

**Welcome and Introductions**

OOD Council Chair Dr. Carolyn Peters welcomed everyone to the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

Dr. Peters stated today is National Interpreter Appreciation Day. She thanked interpreters for their hard work in providing information to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf blind.

Also, Dr. Peters stated this week is Public Service Recognition Week. She thanked OOD staff for their hard work.

**Approval of Minutes**

Council member jw Smith moved to approve the January 22, 2020 minutes, seconded by Council member Jane Gerhardt. Motion carried.

**Written Public Comment**

Council member Jane Gerhardt read the written comments, which were provided by Emily Turner, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Goodwill Industries and Kelly Manns, Assistant Director, Evaluation and Training Services, Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries. Written comments are attached.

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Dr. Peters asked if the Council would like to have a better understanding of federal and state dollars in a format that is comprehensive and explains the different funding sources. There was no comment from Council members.

**Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Update**

OOD Director Kevin Miller reported there is going to be a hole in the budget due to the pandemic. The earlier we make decisions about spending cuts, the better off we will be down the road. OOD is in a hiring freeze. There are travel restrictions. There are no promotions, unless it is a critical need, then OOD could approve a temporary working level. OOD is looking at stopping IT contracts - not provider contracts. The Office of Budget and Management controls the spending. OOD is considering everything to protect services and programming for individuals with disabilities.

OOD Council member Jeremy Morris stated the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (OSILC) can fill-in with funding from the CARES Act to stabilize funding. OSILC does not want to see future cuts in its budget.

Director Miller stated OOD continues to engage with stakeholders. He thanked the providers for their great dialogue. He stated OOD had an impressive call yesterday with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). It was nice to hear positive things about OOD counselors reaching out as part of OOD’s REACH program. Council member Pete Moore stated OPERA calls key partners every two-weeks. Emily Turner stated Goodwills talk every two weeks. Director Miller stated he and DODD Director Davis talk weekly.

Director Miller stated Rhonda Tanner, Deputy Director of OOD’s Division of Disability Determination retired and Teresa Gray is the Acting Deputy Director of the Division of Disability Determination.

**Employer and Innovation Services Update**

Division of Employer and Innovation Services (EIS) Deputy Director Kristen Ballinger stated EIS has created a new tool called the Urgent Jobs List to support OOD job seekers who are interested in obtaining employment with an essential business. The list is a compilation of several employers from across the state. The Urgent Jobs List is updated weekly by EIS staff and published on the Information for Employers page of the OOD website.

Ms. Ballinger stated May is Mental Health Awareness Month and OOD is hosting a free webinar for employers, titled Mental Health Disabilities in the Workplace. The training is targeted to employer partners and how to support workers with mental health

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disabilities in the workplace. The training will take place as a Microsoft Teams Live Event and will be hosted by OOD’s Worksite Accessibility Specialist, Julie Zeigler Wood, Occupational Therapist Registered/Licensed. She invited Council members to join the webinar.

EIS Deputy Director Ballinger stated EIS has also developed a virtual training calendar to continue to offer educational opportunities for Employer Partners over the next several months.

Ms. Ballinger stated we have a lot of students preparing to move into the workforce following graduation and we are working with those seniors by hosting virtual interviews with employer partners. To support OOD’s Ohio College2Careers participants, OOD’s Career Development Specialists are coordinating virtual interviews to take place later this month with OOD employer partners. This will help students prepare, mock interview, resume revision assistance, and OOD will provide a virtual interview tip sheet to them.

Ms. Ballinger stated EIS is supporting employers during COVID-19. Her team is developing guides to assist employers in communicating safety precautions for associates with disabilities. EIS is developing a guide for employers about virtual/remote job coaching in the workplace.

Council member jw stated he loves the idea about a guide. He asked for a copy of the guide or if the Council could assist in any way. Ms. Ballinger responded, yes, she would love the feedback. She stated the guide breaks down communication tips in three categories.

Chair Dr. Peters stated there are verbal ques about social distancing that the blind community could use.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Program Update**

*BVR Update:* Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Deputy Director Susan Pugh stated on Friday, March 13, 2020, all VR staff began working from home. There were a little bit of equipment needs for support staff. However, VR staff have laptops and were able to move home and begin working remotely. The IT team did an amazing job getting laptops and other equipment to them within a few days. Protecting customer information is important. We also had to make sure our providers knew how to reach us and make sure our participants knew how to reach us. Staff have called all program participants to let them know that we are still working and are available to assist them.

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Ms. Pugh stated OOD established a new service called REACH (Refer, Educate, and Check-In). Providers offering this service complete check-ins with OOD participants to identify their current needs, provide information to address those needs and make corresponding referrals when needed. REACH began a couple of weeks ago and we have had a tremendous response from our partners in terms of delivering the service. These services are being delivered remotely. OOD added in flexibilities to the VR Fee Schedule services to allow services to be provided remotely as well. However, there are a few services that are designed to be on a worksite and cannot be done remotely. We are pleased to see that services are being continued and being paid. We also continue to see staff process new applications for services.

BVR Deputy Director Pugh sated OOD has implemented a number of flexibilities for OOD staff and providers to ensure that services can continue to the maximum extent possible. Examples include flexibilities to get signatures from participants, remote service delivery and modifications to the summer services for students with disabilities.

Ms. Pugh stated we are approaching summer and OOD serves about 3,000 students with disabilities with varying work experiences in the community. We were ready, but then the pandemic came. We provided training on a new VR Summer Youth Foundations, but we are not sure about students being at worksites later in the summer.

Council member jw Smith asked, how are you addressing students without computers? BVR Deputy Director Pugh responded, we are working with Fiscal and IT staff to purchase technology for students who don’t have access to computers. We don’t know what the gap is because some students may have access. During the summer program, the provider will work with the students to make sure they can use the technology. Then, OOD counselors will reach out to students and families to assess their needs. Ms. Pugh stated summer services can be one-on-one or in a group setting. Services can be delivered remotely as this time.

Ms. Pugh stated the Combined State Plan continues to go through the process and will be submitted to the federal government after public comment.

Ms. Pugh stated Participant Focus Groups were held in January. The Focus Group topic included transition services. Students indicated they would like OOD to help them to find and keep a job after graduation, choose and get ready for college or other training after high school, get their driver’s license and participate in longer work experiences in the summer. She stated the Participant Focus Groups planned in April have been postponed.

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BVR Deputy Director Pugh referred Council members to the Customer Satisfaction Survey Report. She stated, during the second quarter of Federal Fiscal Year 2020 there were 4,654 closure letters generated that included a link to the customer satisfaction survey. Those cases with email addresses (2,782), also received an automated e-mail message with the toll-free number and survey link encouraging participants to share their experiences from OOD. There were 169 respondents.

BVR Deputy Director Pugh stated OOD has rule packages moving forward to realign with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) changes on how OOD is to operate its waiting lists, which OOD does not have. There are options for states to have an exception to the Order of Selection so if someone has lost their job, they do not stay on a waiting list.

*BSVI Update:* BSVI Deputy Director Greg Dormer stated providers of Orientation and Mobility are struggling to keep their Orientation and Mobility staff. Sarah Kelly, Program Manager, took the lead to come up with tasks that fall under the Orientation and Mobility umbrella. New guidance was developed and released to the providers, allowing for remote assessment and services under a limited scope.

Mr. Dormer stated OOD received feedback from the National Federation of the Blind and the Sight Centers about how well the OOD counselors are working with providers, and participants with problem solving accessibility and technology issues.

Mr. Dormer stated OOD is working in partnership with The Ohio Channel to make transcripts from the Governor’s daily press conferences available to individuals who are not able to access the information visually or auditorily, such as individuals who are deafblind. OOD staff receive the AI generated transcripts from The Ohio Channel. Then the information is edited to formatting and grammatical corrections. The transcripts are then sent out to the deafblind advocacy groups, the Community Centers for the Deaf, and posted on OOD’s Newsline channel.

BSVI Deputy Director Dormer stated as ODJFS develops and implements their new unemployment applicant systems, Katie Frederick and Leonard Rojas who are OOD staff, are working in collaboration with ODJFS staff to test the accessibility of the system to ensure that it is accessible for all Ohioans.

Mr. Dormer stated OOD is hosting weekly meetings for the CCD Directors to allow them to stay connected as a network and collectively problem solve similar issues such as remote interpreting and access to information.

OOD staff have been collecting resources to share with consumers and community partners to help reduce isolation as individuals are required to stay in their homes. These resources include national, state, and local resources to help individuals meet their basic needs.

Mr. Dormer stated BSVI is partnering with the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio on May 5 to engage with the blind community through a teleconference. The purpose is to provide updates on services, remote delivery and availability of services, as well as what to expect from OOD during this time.

Lastly, Mr. Dormer stated BSVI had a great meeting with NFB Ohio. NFB Ohio President Payne is to host a Zoom meeting to invite constituents to join. They talked about the budget, answered questions, got good feedback from them. NFB gave shout-outs to specific counselors that they have been working with.

OOD Council member jw Smith stated he appreciates the updates and reports. Is it possible to provide a narrative under the metrics. Mr. Dormer said yes, he would add the narrative to future reports.

**Chair’s Comments**

Dr. Carolyn Peters stated the VR Policy subcommittee needs members. Council members Dave Baker, Lisa Hickman, Andrea Kramer, and Alison McKay agreed to be members of the VR Policy subcommittee. Ms. Marchi is to work with BVR Deputy Director Pugh and the VR Policy subcommittee members on dates and times of the meeting.

Dr. Peters stated VR is doing an outstanding job. She has heard that OOD job participants were pleasantly surprised with phone calls from VR staff.

**Council Members Discussion/Comments**

Dr. Peters thanked Council member Gerhardt for reading the public comments.

Council member John Moore requested that interpreters use Zoom with Teams Live for the next Council meeting.

**Adjourn**

Council member Carl LoParo moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Council member Jane Gerhardt. Motion carried.*­­­­­*