

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

## Public Forum – St. Louis, MO

### August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019

---

**SRC Members in Attendance:** Geoff Barney, Brenda Whitlock, Clay Berry, Brady Clevenger, Mark Bauer, Karen Nelson, Donna Borgmeyer.

**Public Attendees:** Brenda Linley, St. Louis Society for the Blind – host of Public Forum. Brian Schultz, Job Seeker.

**Phone:** Two Callers

**RSB Attendees:** Keith Roderick, Mark Runyan, Kayla Cole, Katherine Cronin, Lisa Randolph, Erica Lorenz, Vickie Yvoich.

**Open Meeting:** Chairman Clay Berry opens meeting, welcomes callers, introductions of all attendees.

**Speakers:** Starkloff Disability Institute. Speakers: Lori Becker and Jason Hartsfield. The Starkloff Disability Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to helping people with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Starkloff Disability Institute sees itself as the Workforce, Workplace Disability Advisor. The Starkloff Career Academy prepares participants for competitive employment, and Starkloff Workplace Advisors also works with companies to insure they are prepared to welcome them.

Jason is the Adult Career Services Coordinator at Starkloff. He works with those who are in the age ranges of 22-70's. One of the events Jason is involved in is the Starkloff Career Academy Capstone Course. They currently offer this course twice a year, in the spring and fall. The course is made up of twenty, 3 hour sessions over the course of 10 weeks. Classes take place at the Starkloff office in downtown St. Louis on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. The average class size is anywhere from 8 – 15 with the max being 16 participants.

Lori Becker is the Chief Operating Officer and Director of Development and Communications at Starkloff. She explains that something they have found while working with adults in their programs is that many of these adults come out of college with degrees in fields that cooperation's are not hiring for. Starkloff wanted to start conversations with kids with disabilities while they are much younger to expose them to careers in emerging fields, mostly STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). This helps them learn about the possibilities out there that will set them up to choose the right skills and education path moving forward. This helps students be set up to have the best chance moving forward for their future in the job market. There is a

program within Starkloff called 'Dream Big' that many have attended, including RSB clients, who are all doing quite well after completing the program. Dream Big takes kids for one to three weeks over the summer and every day they go visit a different company. These companies really roll out the red carpet for these kids, giving them a tour, introducing different professionals and the jobs available, interactive activities and even feed them breakfast and lunch. Following the morning introduction these companies provide space within their office or building for Starkloff staff to introduce what they call 'Adulting with a Disability.' This focuses on goal setting, independent living, how to self-advocate, what life will be like once they turn 18 and need to advocate for themselves for accommodations in school and/or work. This sets individuals up to be ready for their transition into post-secondary school, lessening their chances of wasting time or failing in classes. These are important things to focus on and work with because statistics show that 54% of students with disabilities who graduated college were still unemployed.

#### **Q & A – Questions from the SRC:**

Karen Nelson: Is there a cost?

Lori Becker: There is no out of pocket cost to the individuals who participate in the program. We are currently in the process of applying with the department of elementary and secondary education to become a proprietary school. We are currently listed as a vendor with Maryville University to receive a reimbursement for the Capstone class and other classes we offer. This structure will likely change once we switch over to a proprietary school. 95% of our income currently is from charitable income that is privately donated by individuals, cooperation's and foundations. The other 5% is from reimbursement or professional service fees.

Karen Nelson: What types of jobs are you seeing individuals get that go through your programs? Are they more administrative, professional, or a mix?

Jason Hartsfield: It is really all over the place. Broadly speaking it is more skilled professional. We have everyone from people who work in HR, to someone who works at Boeing as a software engineer, mechanical engineers, people who work in IT, individuals who have completed their PhD. It is all over the place.

Clay Berry: Are most of the individuals who complete the program hired by your partnering employers or is it outside of them as well?

Jason Hartsfield: Again it is all over the place. We have a number of people who are at our partnering employers but many others who work elsewhere. Some even work with different contractors and agencies.

Clay Berry: How far is your geographical reach?

Jason Hartsfield: Mostly the St. Louis area but we have worked with others that have come from across the state. We have worked with others out of state and tried an online course but have found we don't currently have the resources to do that as affectively as we would like.

**Q & A – Questions from the Public:**

Brian Schultz: Have you noticed through the Dream Big program that companies have become more open to accommodations? As in, be more willing to work with someone who may need to use JAWS?

Lori Becker: Absolutely. The program works both ways, educating the kids as well as the company.

Jason Hartsfield: We notice the same thing with the capstone course, it is very educational the employers as well as the individuals in the program. It is a good training for company recruiters as well as our participants.

**Closing** – Brenda Whitlock thanks Starkloff for coming and states it is great to hear how far they have come and what is currently happening within their agency. Geoff Barney shares the St. Louis school for the blind will have a new graduating class. Karen Nelson states nothing new to share as far as Lighthouse for the blind.

Clay Berry (Chair) closes meeting by thanks speakers and attendees.

**Adjourn**

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

## Business Meeting – St. Louis, MO

### August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

---

**SRC Members in Attendance:** Brady Clevenger, Clay Berry, Geoff Barney, Karen Nelson, Brenda Whitlock, Mark Bauer, Donna Borgmeyer, Chris Gray

**RSB Attendees:** Michael St. Julien, Kayla Cole, Mark Runyan, Keith Roderick, Katherine Cronin

**Open Meeting:** Clay Berry opens with discussing the public forum from the night before. Options were discussed on how to better advertise for our public forums in the future in hopes for better turn out. Geoff Barney offered to host next year's St. Louis Public forum as they will have their zip line up and running then as well, may be a good attraction point. Geoff also mentioned that Mind's Eye may advertise the forum in the St. Louis Area for free over the radio. Clay mentioned that Audio Reader may be able to do it as well for other parts of the state that could reach all the way to Columbia.

**Minutes:** Minutes were reviewed and accepted.

**District Report:** [Katherine Cronin](#)- Just finished PY18, St. Louis South office closed 41 clients successfully. Already looking optimistic going fresh into PY19. New VRC, Erica Lorenz started in July and is doing great, she was at the public forum and got to meet everyone apart of the council which was a good opportunity. We have several other fairly new staff, Vickie Yvoich and Catherine Spence that are also VRC's as well as a new Rehab Teacher, Sherry Low. By the end of the week we will have two staff retiring so we are just moving a long and doing well with the new staff as they come.

**Field Report:** [Michael St. Julien](#)- Lots of retirements happening all at once but moving along smoothly. Projects going on currently, Regional Leadership Academy. Two of our staff have been participating, Katy Cawdron and Samantha Scott. During this academy they focus on building leadership skills and characteristics. They do quite a bit of reading and activities they go through and then recently they met in person in Kansas City.

State as a model employer is actively meeting, looking at the initiative looking at how to improve employment outcomes with individuals with disabilities. The Governor's office will be sending out notices and emails letting everyone know the specific details of what is rolling out, expecting that to come out around September.

Employment first – Currently looking at customized employment. Finally started pilot training in customized employment. There will be three different phases of this. The first is currently taking place in Jefferson City. The next phase and meeting will take place in Springfield in October. From there the following meetings will be set up in the months to

follow. Participants in this group are RSB, MVR, DWD, Mental Health, Paraquad and others. No VRC's are attending yet, currently just a pilot for management staff to attend and then gather from there who should attend future trainings. Part of the Employment first initiative focuses on benefits planning. We are taking the tiered approach of this to get our staff involved. They will not be benefits planning experts but the information they take from these training is beneficial in serving our clients and knowing where to send them for guidance and give them the information they take from the training they attend.

**Director's Report:** [Keith Roderick](#) – Dr. Corsi has left, Jennifer Tidball is acting, Pat Luebbering is no longer FSD Director, now back to Department of Finance. Reggie McElhannon is interim, job has been posted for permanent Director Position. Reggie seems really interested in learning about RSB and what we do. We have weekly meetings set up to discuss what is going on within the program so I think that is a great way to start a good working relationship with our new Interim Director. On the federal level, Mark Schultes has been named commissioner of RSA. This is a big deal because when RSA does not have a commissioner guidance is light as it is hard to set certain standards without a commissioner so this is important. Keith believes this is a good fit as Mark Schultes has well rounded experience in related fields where this will be a benefit to working together and having good understanding of what we do and who we help.

AWARE – System began on time and under budget. Vendors were very well organized, it worked well and things seem to be going smoothly. Previous case management system went down June 14<sup>th</sup> and AWARE was up and running on July 1<sup>st</sup>. These dates were intentional as the Department of Finance shuts down during the same time so there were no additional delay on payments and of course none on services. This intentional plan of dates worked well and went smooth for everyone involved. System 7 is still available to staff as a read only access. Open cases moved over to AWARE fully but closed cases were only moved 2 years' worth due to 911 changes. System 7 will remain available to staff for another 5 years remaining as read only access so staff can get to anything they may need.

Policy Manual updates- There are timeframes from RSA that RSB are given to move clients into different statuses. One of the changes in the Policy manual was that the extension agreement whether that is to determine eligibility or for their plan extension, no longer have to be signed by the client. Another change took place in equipment purchases. RSB use to require that if equipment authorizations were over \$1,000 the DS would have to sign off on it. This has been changed due to the Aware system, as it did not have the capability to recreate those 'hard stops'. When we looked into why we did this we could not find any recent documentation on that. Due to this, it was decided to move the amount of required approval from 1,000 to 3,000 instead. We also added a Pre-Employment Transition guide. This is something that our agency has worked on for

many years but finally were able to finalize and add this in there. We did put this out for public comment, no comments or changes were asked of, so that was added without issue.

Counselor Focus groups – This is something Keith has recently brought back. RSB use to hold these about 10 or more years ago but has sense stopped. Keith saw it as a mentoring and feedback opportunity and has begun holding them again. During these focus groups we get 3 out of the 6 offices together at 1 time, we've split them up into two groups due to size. These will be counselor lead, Keith will attend them but no supervisors will attend so that staff can feel that they can speak freely and discuss topics they feel are a struggle. The topics can be anything from policy, to difficult cases, etc. This helps discuss situations with their peers and get feedback from one another to help educate themselves and better work their cases as well as serve their clients. The peer mentoring really seems to be a positive as well as giving individuals leadership opportunities to take turns leading and planning these meetings with their peers in other offices. Another big part of this is explaining the 'why' behind certain sets of standards, rules, documentation requirements and case flow needs. Staff may know what is expected of them but they may not always understand the why behind it so this is something very beneficial to staff as well to create a better understanding of what they do and why they do it.

Exempt vs. Non Exempt Unsuccessful Closure reasons -

Exempt: Prison or Jail, death, called to active duty, health condition impeding them from working.

Non Exempt –Unable to locate, no longer interested, transfer to another agency.

Staff positions – RSB is looking into positions as they become open. Reevaluating different FTEs. As an example, with a vacancy opening for a BEP supervisor, we will use that FTE to hire another Children Specialist. That need seems to be a higher priority right now. So those are examples of things we are looking at and will continue to look at in the future.

BEP – Jim Brinkmann is doing a great job with the program. We can ask him to come speak at the next public forum to give everyone more information on what is going on in that program and what we are looking for it to be in the near future.

State Plan – Working with core partners, everything is going well. Keith has been working with our Contracts Manager, Angie Dick, on helping set everything up. RSB will submit this to the council for approval and then pass it along.

Blind Pension – RSB has been doing well working into taking new referrals from blind pension and reaching out. If they are 65 or younger they are placed into a VR referral, over 65 go to OBS referral. We have been tracking referrals to trace the outcome on

whether or not the referrals turn into active cases. Vast majority do not, but RSB is receiving some. The process works by RSB staff receiving the information from blind pension, placing the referral into our system assigning them to the District Supervisor.

**WIOA:** [Keith Roderick](#) – Not many changes or updates. Working on state plan currently, that is the biggest thing going on right now.

**Fact Sheet:** [Keith Roderick](#)- Reviewed

**Fiscal Report:** [Mark Runyan](#) – Currently still in 2019, 2020 has not yet been posted but expecting to find out soon. AWARE came and working through the interface process in regards to payments and processing. Wrapping up contracts with vendors, updating pricing and language on contracts that haven't been revisited in a while. POB has continued to work on advertisement for their program. Do to policy changes in regards to what can be given out to the public flyers had to have prior approval, some changes were made and now signs are complete and expected to be posted in license offices very soon. Looking into posting on social media as well as distributing to our District Offices. Heavily working on prior approvals, soon to be asking for prior approvals for all of next year's fiscal years expected expenses for things such as equipment.

**Committee Reports:**

*Program and Policy:* Brady Clevenger, Mark Bauer, Clay Berry

*Evaluation Committee:* Geoff Barney, Betty Farley, Brady Clevenger

*Planning Committee:* Brenda Whitlock, MPACT employee, Karen Nelson, Mark Bauer

*Government Affairs:* Shelia Wright, Chris Gray, Donna Borgmeyer

**SILK:** Meeting on August 9<sup>th</sup>, planning to give out a scholarship at that time.

**Old Business:** Survey Monkey discussed, in place to begin collecting data.

**New Business:** Officer Appointments.

**Meeting adjourned**