

# North Carolina Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

## Quarterly Meeting Minutes

August 4, 2023

9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Joint Forces Headquarters, Raleigh, NC

### **Members Present:**

Christina Armfield  
Antwan Campbell  
Kevin Earp  
Michael Evola  
Betty Kelly  
Greta Knigga-Daugherty  
Stephen Latus  
Mike Lupo  
Dr. Robert Nutt  
Daphne Peacock  
Megan Pender  
Neil Robinette  
Laurie Ann Rook  
David Rosenthal  
Donald Tinsley Sr.  
Hope Turpin  
Saarah Waleed  
Jennifer Woodard

### **Ex Officio:**

Jan Withers (Present)

### **Liaison:**

Kim Harrell (Present)

### **Members Absent:**

Linda Amato  
Kathy Dowd  
Rebecca Freeman  
Pattie Griffin  
Randal Lee Hartline  
Rep. Ya Liu  
Dr. Claudio Pagliaro  
Senator Bill Rabon  
Rep. Diane Wheatley

<b>Current Vacant Council Seat(s)</b>
Senate Appointees (2)- President Pro Tempore
Governor Appointees - None

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by David Rosenthal, Chair.

## **Welcome; Introductions; Ethics Reminder; Approve Minutes from May 5, 2023**

**Motion #1:** Donald Tinsley (Antwan Campbell) moved to approve the minutes from May 5, 2023, Council meeting. **Motion Passed.**

None of the members acknowledged having a conflict of interest or appearance therefore on matters listed on this agenda.

### **David Rosenthal, Chair**

Welcomed everyone and those who are watching remotely via YouTube Live. Three new Council members were introduced: Stephen Latus, Neil Robinette, and Jennifer Woodard. The council chair stated it was nice to see everybody in person after several years and how fortunate that Council continued to meet remotely during the difficult times that impacted everyone's life.

### **TDI: Telecommunication for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Jan Withers, Director of Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH)**

The TDI 25<sup>th</sup> biennial conference took place at the University of Maryland College Park, MD in July. The first in-person one since 2019. Networking was a key component of this conference. The policy work that happens on the national level trickles down to state agencies, like ours, DSDHH, and that needs to happen for the policy to be translated into action on the ground. Agencies on the ground are where things really happen. So, our role also is to provide information back up to the feds about what is going on and what the needs are, therefore, policies can be developed to support those activities. And then, to make sure we're providing full accessibility and technology and telecommunications. Exchange of information is so important and mainly what solutions we can provide.

The theme of this conference was digital inclusion for all. We had different plenary sessions, workshops and many of the conversations were around making sure that everyone was included. And who are those people that should be included? And how you include them depends on what the ideal solution is for that individual or that community.

#### **Key Partners (Few examples):**

The key to our work is connections. Conversations with other stakeholders and partnerships. This conference did a lot to strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones:

- Federal Communications Commission
- Administration on Community Living
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration
- Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- National Digital Inclusion Alliance
- National Consortium of Regional Telehealth
- Resource Center
- NC Office of Digital Equity and Literacy
- NC Department of Corrections

We are all familiar with the ADA law that was passed in 1990. This law was written very broadly, but technology was one of the areas that was not addressed in detail at that time. So, to provide more detail and structure for accessibility, the 21st century communication and video

accessibility act of 2010 was added into that. Well, it is not an act yet, but it's a bill which currently sits in Congress. Please visit [www.CTVAaccess.org](http://www.CTVAaccess.org) for more information.

The new CEO for TDI, Ann Marie Killman, started on July 2023 with 30 years of experience in different specialty areas like Human Resource, Marketing, Management and much more!

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

### **Kevin Earp: Program specialist, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Vocational Rehabilitation helps people with disabilities to achieve their goals for employment and become independent. Independence can mean a lot of things and will cover lots of services. The services that we provide vary greatly and the people that we serve vary greatly, all types of disability groups in all types of areas.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Services** (few examples)

- Help people by providing hearing aids to improve their communication on their job.
- Providing wheelchair ramp to ease accessibility.
- Providing shower modification
- Any type of system in home to make home accessible.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Overview 2022**

There is some information and statistics about the programs in general of Vocational Rehabilitation:

- Client assistant program
  - 331 clients were provided with information and referrals.
  - 5,000 outreaches to individuals in underserved/unserved population.
- Independent Living
  - 1,879 new applications for independent living services are processed annually.
  - 667 cases closed successfully after achieving their independent living goals.
  - 338 clients received personal care services.
- Assistive Technology
  - 11,752 consumers were served in 2022 by the assistive technology program.
  - 11,559 total services provided (Individuals contacts, Loan equipment, Training participant)
- Disability Determination
  - 110,333 claims are processed annually for the social security administration.
- VR Training Service
  - 1,152 clients successfully employed after receiving any type of training in 2022.
  - 197 individuals successfully employed after receiving post-secondary academic training at colleges for universities.

## **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Staffing**

- Staff:
  - 1 Statewide Program Specialist for Deaf
  - 12 Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf

- 3 Business Relations Representative
- 11 Caseworker Technicians
- Vacancies:
  - 5 Counselor Vacancies
  - 2 CWT
  - 1 Counselor in Charge
  - Raleigh (RCD, CWT), Morganton (RCD, CIC), Charlotte (2 RCD), Fayetteville (RCD), Goldsboro (CWT), Winston Salem (CWT)

## **Program Updates**

### Fireside Chats:

- Monthly team call for staff serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers
- Every other month, partners share details about their programs and services.
- Office Hours on the alternative month, with open discussion
- Team building and open discussion on policy.
- One-on-one training as needed.
- Onboarding training for new staff.

### ENCORE:

- Our new database system. This new system will replace BEAM, it is an internet base program that will have new features to allow vendors to bill VR directly.

### SERID:

- We are in the process of preparing for the conference of Southeast Regional Institute for the Deaf.

## **Program Impacts**

- High Turnover:
  - Staff are retiring or seeking other positions/promotions for more money.
  - Retirement benefits CUT- No Health Insurance when retired.
  - Staff leaving due to low salary.
  - Competition for higher paying jobs and working from home.
- Hard to Find Qualified and Trained Employees:
 

Another impact on is that a lot of programs that train professionals to work in these positions are being cut. For example, the university of Tennessee, Western Oregon have cut their programs. East Carolina University where they had a special graduate-level program for social workers got cut because they ran out of funds. Barton college in North Carolina where they had Deaf education program is not running anymore. We are fortunate to have one of two universities in the nation that provide master's level training in VR counseling which is University of Winston-Salem.

Regardless of impacts and turnovers, we meet the goals and provide clients with services. Clients can always contact the Manager, Regional Director, or CAP for assistance.

## **Types of Hearing Losses that VR Serve**

- Deaf: Who is often deaf since birth, may not be able to speak in clear tones and often uses sign language to communicate
- Hard of Hearing: They can hear some but not perfectly, often do not acknowledge their hearing loss, they are able to speak clearly.
- Late Deafened: Who become a Deaf later in their life, they often have clear speech foundation from early years, and they are often depressed due to lifestyle crisis.
- Deaf Blind: Who are Deaf and Blind, it can come from Ushers syndrome, RP, and Heredity.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Process of Services**

- Application process-meet with client, preliminary medical documentation, and disability assessment information
- Eligibility process- all clients must be determined eligible to receive VR services
- Assessment Process- all medical records requested to view comprehensive view of consumers impediments
- Planning process -individual plan for employment

Once the person is employed VR continues with the client ensuring stabilization. A job coach can be provided to support individuals during the first few months of employment. A follow-up is conducted 90 days after start of employment to make sure the clients are doing well.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Kim Harrell: DeafBlind State Coordinator, Division of Services for the Blind**

The mission of Division of services for the Blind is to enable North Carolinians who are visually impaired, Blind or DeafBlind to reach their goals of independence and employment. Today we briefly will review services that VR currently offer, which of the VR services doing well for consumers, what challenges VR facing in serving for individuals who are DeafBlind, the current and future VR services for DeafBlind, and data on DeafBlind VR services and how it compares to other States.

## **Division of Services for the Blind VR Programs**

- Rehabilitation, Training and Employment Service
- Division of Services for the Blind Career and Training Center, the residential center where the consumers can come to Raleigh.
- Specialized Student/Youth Transition services
- Business Enterprise Program: The business enterprise program built on the Randolph Shepherd act for the people who are legally blind to work as independent contractors in food service, that includes vendor facilities on Federal, State, and private properties.

## **Specialized VR Services for DSB Consumers**

- Customized Employment
- Vocational Guidance and Counseling: the case manager, consumer and VR team works together to meet the DeafBlind individual's special employment goals.

- College Training and Job Preparation: VR provides the consumers with higher education programs.
- On the Job Training: Providing a program to get a degree if that is their needs for employment. It is a legal document with the business, consumers will work for certain amount of the time and then they will have the job.
- Supported Employment and Job Coaching
- Orientation and Mobility
- Assistance with Voter Registration
- Assistive Technology Assessment and Training: keyboarding skills are the key for assistive technology, this is something that we teach the consumers who need it.
- Purchase of Blindness/Low Vision Related assistive technology.
- Low Vision aid and Appliance Provision: an example for this program is an electronic magnifier that reads captions, and you can change the contrast on it.
- Specialized Job Replacement Services by Business Service Representatives: VR meet and work with the business to get specific employment for the DeafBlind consumers.

### **Student/Youth Transition Services**

We work with students who have disabilities between 14-21 years of age. We have five pre-employment transition services associates to help our consumers of this range of age. They help students with higher education preparation, work experience, summer programs for youths with visual impairment and specialized job placement services.

There are five requirements for transition services by law:

- Job Exploration: This is time for them to explore jobs, do interest inventories and assess job leads.
- Workplace Readiness Training: we teach consumers how to complete resume and cover letters. We do mock interviews and work with them after mock interview based on their answers to make them ready for real interviews. We teach them soft skills and acceptable workplace behavior.
- Work-Based Experience: we set up and schedule and arrange various job shadowing, work experience and internship. Educate them to the job and orient job duties.
- Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities: Help them to identify which school is good for their plan and help them to complete the application and visit the school with them and help them to gain information about the school.
- Self-Advocacy: we teach consumers about their rights as individuals with disabilities, we educate them about ADA law and other laws that might be helpful for them.

### **DSB Career and Training Center**

That is our residential facility. The classes are Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. When classes are over on Friday residents head home.

Programs at the career and training center:

- Independent Living Instruction and Evaluation
- Career Instruction and Evaluation
- Adaptive Recreational Instruction and Participation
- Orientation, Mobility and Travel skills Instruction and Evaluation

- Summer Youth Program including College Preparation, work Experience and Transition Instruction

This career and training center is equipped with all necessary equipment to serve the DeafBlind consumers.

### **DSB Deaf/Blind Services**

We are Fortunate that have five DeafBlind specialist that cover all 100 counties. Three of our five DeafBlind specialists are Deaf and prefer ASL, one of them is Hard of Hearing and one of them is a former interpreter. They provide services such as Equipment Distribution Services, national DeafBlind Equipment Distribution Program, Resource in Community and Community Inclusion, Job Development/Job Placement Services.

### **The Future of VR Services: Exciting Initiatives**

- ABLR: It is partnership between Division of the Services for the Blind and LC industries, it is a training program to become an accessibility analyst.
- DeafBlind NC Transition Stakeholder: It is partnership program with Department of Public Instruction, the DeafBlind Project, Exceptional Children Assistance Center, Division of the Services for the Blind and Helen Keller National Center to collaboration to streamline Vocational Rehab referrals.
- National Center on Deaf-Blindness: It is an initiative for transition service for youth.

DSB has 7 district offices which include Asheville, Charlotte, Fayetteville, Greenville, Raleigh, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem. DSB is confident in its ability to continue providing VR services to our DeafBlind consumers. DSB believes the future is bright.

### **Mental Health Services for North Carolinians who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind**

#### **Kelly Crosbie, Director of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Use Services**

Mental Health is a very common situation for most people, one in five people in the state of North Carolina deal with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety and take medication daily. We are very uncomfortable talking about mental health issues, and we know that people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind struggle even more or even have higher levels of mental health issues, our goal is to change that. One of the important things that we need to work on is to train our health care providers, including mental health providers, to use and understand ASL to meet the treatment goals and support client's needs. All health care organizations are required to provide effective communication access under the ADA and ACA law, but unfortunately 70% of mental health and substance use facilities in North Carolina did not report providing services in ASL to the clients who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind in 2019 study.

### **DMHDDSUS Updates**

- Developing Our Health Equity Plan
  - The 1992/1993 settlement has ended, but we are still committed to meeting the mental health and substance use needs of those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind

- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program Manager Position
  - A person who is fluent in ASL, with lived experience.
- Role
  - Improved continuum of care including education, outreach, prevention, and treatment (mental health, substance issues)
  - Workforce Development
  - Better understanding of our data/needs/impact of program

### **Current Targeted Mental Health Services Funding**

The fund of \$ 2,321,630 from federal grant and state appropriations to provide services.

- Contract with RHA Health Services
  - Provides Services Statewide
  - All Staff are fluent in English and ASL
- Dream Connections
  - Residential Group Home for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind with a mental health diagnosis
- Interpreter Services

### **RHA Health Services**

There are multiple locations statewide to cover our consumers around North Carolina which includes Asheville, Lenoir, Morganton, Charlotte, High Point, Greensboro, Burlington, Raleigh, Lumberton, Fayetteville, Wilson, New Bern, and Wilmington that all are ready to provide our services such as:

- Clinical Assessment
- Outpatient Behavioral Health Service
- Peer Support Services/Recovery Coach
- Outreach & Support
- Case Consultation & Education
- Contract Psychiatry
- Substance Use Treatment
- Online NA Meeting

### **Transformation Transfer Initiative (TTI)**

The funding source that is called Transformation Transfer Initiative, it is a federal funding source:

- SAMHSA funding administered by National Association of Mental Health Program Disorder (NASMHPD)
- Flexible funding intended to help states transform parts of their system.
- This year's topic: Expanding 988 & Crisis Services (988 a national three-number hotline which has talk, chat, text, and video calls to give our Deaf and Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Consumers easier access.)
- Building Crisis Services that Serve Under-resourced Minority Communities
- \$250,000 awarded to NC DMHDDSUS

TTI project does assess mental health crisis needs for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind in NC. And it also, build a resource toolkit for providers in our crisis



supports. The TTI project initiative provides Mental Health/Substance Use Training and trauma-informed and culturally response crisis intervention training for ASL interpreters

### **New Scholarship Program**

We received a 600K scholarship fund for two master level for the people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind to pursue their Mental Health and Substance Use or Dual Licensure

### **NC Agency Schools Transition Plan Updates**

#### **Dr. Lory Morrow, Interim Director of Agency Schools, and Alternative Learning**

There is a new law that is called **HOUSE BILL 11**, the purpose of this law is to transition the schools, the agency schools from the governance structure of the State Board of the Education to their own boards of trustees. This bill was signed into the law in April 2023 and will take effect July 1, 2024. There are several action steps that are in keeping with the law that some of them are completed to date and some are in process.

#### **Action Steps Completed to Date**

- Executive Transition Committee Established
- Report #1 to the North Carolina General Assembly Submitted
- North Carolina State Board of Education Board of Trustee Appointments Confirmed
- Admissions Criteria for 2023-2024 Established
- Admissions Criteria for 2023-2024 Pending State Board Approval

#### **Action Steps in Progress:**

- North Carolina General Assembly Appointments of Board of Trustee Members
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Transition Team

### **Council Feedback, Updates and Wrap Up**

#### **Council Chair, David Rosenthal**

The Council Chair had the opportunity to speak with several Deaf and Hearing community members and heard some unfortunate feedback from them that the Council doesn't do much. There is a lot of talk but there's no action.

Do you perceive some of these feelings? Have you heard that from people you represent?

- One member agreed with some of the comments and suggests connecting with other agencies, we have different variety of people with different job in their fields working with Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind consumers, that we can connect with to see how we can better serve our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community
- Meeting virtually was tough, felt like we were going down a list of presentation after presentation. Would like to see us get back to rolling up our sleeves again and get to work on committee issues like we did pre-COVID
- North Carolina is a progressive state and I believe the Council has done a lot
- It is important to consider what Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and what their families concerns are and possibly bring them to the Council Meeting and figure out what we can

do about it. We can have people who specialize in the area and get information and resources from them and take it to the people who we are representing.

- After each virtual meeting there was not an opportunity for discussion, so appreciated today's presentation and the ability to ask questions. Also, it is a great opportunity for the presenters to hear from us. We need more time for Q&A in future meetings
- Bring back the monthly committee meetings back in-person or virtually and discuss the information that we received from the Council presentations and start working on some project that needs to get done.
- It is important to develop new partnerships and strengthen old partnerships with meeting during breaks in in-person meetings and knowing each other and learning from each other. Also, it would be important and beneficial to have small committees after the Council Meeting to discuss issues and try to find a solution then bring those solutions back to Council.
- Develop a strategic plan/goals/vision of Council
- It would be nice to have some sort of retreat, where we can bring facilitators to help us partner together and it could come up with ways that we can improve the Council. The DSDHH Director Jan Withers mentioned that NC Law that governs this requires that the council meet at least four times a year and believes that is the only requirement. She mentioned the cost of a retreat such as interpreters, captioning, and the logistics required and overnight stays for Council members could be substantial.
- Attendance participation at committee meetings is a major concern.
- Need to keep a close eye on the recent HB11 regarding the Board of Trustees, heard many concerns that they didn't get community input on the process. Would like clear information to all members on exactly what's happening (not sure who can do this)

The council chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and stated there is more to be discussed and will be reaching out to some members.

**Meeting Adjourned at 3:00 p.m.**

2023 Meetings: November 3

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dsdhh/councils-commissions>