MCB Statutory Advisory Board Minutes

December 6, 2021

**Present SAB:**

Joe Abely, Chair

Susan Foley

Amy Ruell

Kim Charlson

**Present MCB:**

David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner

John Oliveira, Deputy Commissioner

Loran Lang, MCB General Counsel

Regina DiMarzo, Assistant to the Commissioner

Carla Kath, Director of Communications

Some members of the public also attended.

Joe asked the SAB to approve the November meeting minutes and they were approved.

The meeting was recorded with local recording permission.

**Dashboard for Tracking MCB Performance**

The dashboard spreadsheets were reviewed. They showed decreased cases and closures in SR for the past two years of the pandemic. VR closures increased to 158 in FY 2021 compared to 125 in FY 2020. Susan said that it is very important to calculate the rehabilitation rate, the number of rehabilitations divided by the total number of both successful and unsuccessful closures and requested that MCB include this figure in the future. (Additional information: MCB’s rehabilitation rate was 66% for FY 2021; 158 rehabilitations and 80 unsuccessful closures.)

Joe asked whether MCB has had enough funds to provide needed services and John answered that we have and that consumers have not had to wait for paid services. He added that MCB has about 200 new VR applicants a year and that most of their rehabilitation services occur over three or more years before job placement and rehabilitation.

**Commissioner’s Update**

* David said that MCB is in the final stages of appointing someone to assume Mary Otiato’s duties as manager of the Central Register and as director of policy. He hopes to announce the appointment before the holidays. Mary had several other areas of responsibility (ombudsman and chief of staff) that will be assumed by others at MCB. The Central Register has had a vacant position for some time that will be filled soon by someone that also will be able to work on federal and state reporting. In the meantime, Susan Lavin has been helping with registration. There is currently little delay in registration.
* David reported that $7.8 million of the agency’s $28 million dollar budget has been paid out to date. Much more has been encumbered but not yet paid. All staff and vendors have been asked to spend expeditiously to meet needs. John reported that the Carroll Center for the Blind is at capacity. MABVI is offering a one-day training program for SR consumers. New England Low Vision is processing referrals. John pointed out that the funds have only actually been available for a short time. Joe asked whether there is demand. John said that there is but that one cause of delay has been the difficulty buying laptops for consumers who need training. Since there is a global shortage, a small buyer like MCB is not a top priority for distributers. The situation is improving, and John said that he had received six referrals for computer training that morning.

**Update on private business endeavors**

David gave an update on the initiative relating to private business endeavors. He said that it is difficult to find consumers with the right skills and interests for self-employment, but that we are continuing to ask counselors to identify appropriate clients. NIB has a training program and NIB staff attended the last MCB VR Committee meeting to describe it to the VR counselors. One issue in finding candidates is that consumers who are employed are reluctant to take a chance on other opportunities. John has asked NIB to consider Saturday training sessions for that reason.

Joe asked whether the NIB opportunities are commission-based and David said that they are. David said that NIB offers a website to sell products, shipping services, etc. but that we are not wedded to the NIB model alone. Amazon and, possibly the MBTA, offer other sales platforms. John said that MCB is currently looking to recruit five consumers to take the NIB training.

Susan suggested that MCB consider this kind of self-employment/entrepreneurship training for pre-employment transition services (PRETS) consumers. John said that that is definitely MCB’s intention. Right now some of vendors of the agency’s PRETS programs are including content on small business careers.

**“What’s Your Vision” Campaign Update**

Carla introduced Alison Percy and other staff at Marketing Doctor to give the SAB a report on the “What’s Your Vision” marketing campaign that ran across the state this summer, ending on October 31. Carla said that MCB’s experience with the media planning and buying services and associated analytics provided by Marketing Doctor has been wonderful. Marketing Doctor is based in Northampton and very aware of the need to market in all areas of the state.

Highlights of the report include:

* Key metrics: More than 8.8 million web impressions (views); more than 100,000 clicks on MCB material; a “click-through” rate of 1.18%; 3.2 million video views.
* Platforms included: TV, radio, newspapers, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google.
* 4 television stations, 7 newspapers, and 7 cable TV zones hosted ads.
* Online targeting of employers, eye care professionals, and persons with visual impairments was part of the strategy.
* Offline impressions are estimated at 42 million (28 million from television, 10 million from radio, and 3.5 million from print.

Alison offered MCB a few suggestions for future campaigns:

* An additional refresh of the television spot. It was only refreshed once.
* Increase the use of television and streaming television.
* Put more emphasis on the use of public television.
* Find more ways to target employers.

Susan asked Alison her opinion of the best way to reach employers. Alison said that in her experience, LinkedIn is very good. Susan also suggested that MCB offer to make a presentation on the campaign to CSAVR since CSAVR has been studying the best ways to reach youth on social media.

**2021 year in review and 2022 challenges**

Joe asked David to discuss 2021 and 2022 and to let the SAB members know how they can help in 2022.

David reviewed the challenges and successes of the 2021. Covid and health concerns among staff and consumers continue to be a major focus. David is very relieved that there was less disease than initially feared among staff and consumers. Funding has been more than adequate and consumer options have continued to increase. MCB held eight major web events (including the job fair, internship ceremonies, and a conference for Teachers of the Visually-Impaired), eight medium-sized events, and numerous smaller events. The plan had been to start holding hybrid online/offline events, but that approach has had to be postponed due to the recent Covid surge.

Challenges for 2022 include:

* Completing the implementation of the modernization of the Central Register processes;
* Implementing the agency’s new purchasing system. It will be a great improvement since it is paperless but new systems are always challenging;
* Exploring and procuring a new communications system that includes a telephone system that better meets the needs of MCB consumers.
* Filling the jobs of staff who have recently retired or announced upcoming retirement.

David said that he would very much appreciate the SAB’s help with process of promulgating new regulations to allow MCB to work directly with cities and towns to expedite tax abatements of legally blind consumers.

Susan asked about services for youth and said that she has heard favorable mention of MCB’s graphic novel on VR. She suggested that MCB events for 2022 focus on youth. John said that another conference for Teachers of the Visually-Impaired will be held in April and that he believes that MCB’s new management of the AIM library will provide new opportunities to engage youth in 2022.

Amy asked why MCB VR consumers have to physically sign applications and rehabilitation plans since that can lead to delays in service. She suggested DocuSign. John said that our case management system, Aware, is about to roll out a similar system for VR consumers. The reason that there has been delay is that the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration has only recently approved electronic signatures. He added that MCB’s new purchasing system, Checkbook, will allow consumers to apply electronically for reimbursement of readers’ fees and books and supplies. Amy requested that MCB inform the SAB of similar projects in the future.

David said that Carla is preparing to send stakeholders a year-end report on events and also a report on 2022 goals and objectives. She will soon send the SAB members both reports.

Next meeting: Friday, January 14 at noon.