**Statutory Advisory Board (SAB)**

**February 7, 2023**

**Minutes**

SAB Attendees: Howard Purcell, Chair, Colleen Moran, Blair Wong, and Kathy Petkauskos

Absent: Brian MacDonald

MCB Staff Attendees: David D’Arcangelo, Commissioner, Shandra Gardiner, Loran Lang, Michael Saccone, Nathan Skrocki, Alexander Pooler, Thelma Williams, and Lucy Evangelidis

Meeting Held via Zoom; Recordings made available to public on MCB YouTube channel

Public invited to participate through Q&A made at end of the meeting.

Call to accept Minutes from January 3, 2023 meeting.

Moved and accepted.

Commissioner’s Update

Introduced the new Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, Lucy Evangelidis as well as Shandra Gardiner, Mike Saccone, and Nate Skrocki.

New secretary, Kate Walsh announced. The Commissioner has met with acting secretary Beckman several times. There have been some changes and movement throughout Health and Human Services.

Financial Data

MCB is in a strong place. Legislature had put an earmark aside for assistive technology (AT) which has been all spent, which is a good thing. There is still additional “regular” budget money for assistive technology.

Partnerships

Howard Purcell, chair, asked if the Commissioner could provide some examples of existing partnerships. The Commissioner gave the NECO low vision fellowship as an example. The Commissioner is looking for any ideas or advice that the board has in terms of delivery services to consumers.

The Chair gave further information on the low vision residency at NECO and the importance of the partnership with MCB.

Surveys

The Commissioner said that the AT survey results should be available soon. The survey is a vocational rehabilitation (VR) reallotment project.

The larger social rehabilitation (SR) survey is set to launch in the spring with assistance from Mass Inc. and will be completed by June 30th. The Commissioner thinks the results from this survey will be beneficial for shaping programs and services moving forward.

The Chair asked when the board will be able to see the results from the SR survey and reminded everyone to continue to explain what acronyms stand for as there are people on the call who might be unaware.

The Commissioner explained the communications process for the AT survey results and said that the board will get the results sometime soon, even possibly next month.

The Commissioner was optimistic that the board will get the SR survey results by the summer. A report will be created to summarize the results from the survey.

The Commissioner gave a brief overview of VR and SR.

The Chair asked if there were any additional questions from the group.

Blair Wong asked if the survey results are tied to decisions the board must make in terms of how funds are dispersed by June 30th.

The Commissioner said that the AT survey is related to VR strictly and MCB’s federal grant. There could potentially be a slight change in allocation of funds but it will not affect the amount of funds received. The purpose of the SR survey is to get a high-level understanding of the consumers with information that we cannot currently get out of AWARE.

Blair had to leave the meeting at 10:25.

Alexander Pooler: Director of Assistive Technology and Database Solutions at MCB

The Chair asked Alexander to give an overview of his department and its functions. Alexander discussed AWARE, MCB’s client database software, which is primarily designed to produce data and reports for the Rehab Services Administration. AWARE has done an adequate job at making sure that MCB meets all expectations from RSA for the federal reporting. Surveys will include data that is not readily available in AWARE.

Alexander explained that the AT unit has employees assigned to each region. Alex gave an overview of the six MCB regions. These employees work both SR & VR cases as they come through. Core focus of this unit is to find ways to leverage technology whether that be dedicated assistive technology for people with visual impairments or consumer technology that can be augmented to meet the consumers’ needs.

He discussed the challenges faced on both the SR & VR sides.

AT works with partners in the community. AT evolution came to a stop during the pandemic but is starting back up again. Three companies we worked with during the pandemic were New Eyes, Wear Works, and For Blind. We are now starting to reengage with our community partners to provide trainings and technology deployments.

Kathy Petkauskos asked how MCB lets consumers know about all the AT options and innovations.

Alexander listed the different methods: virtual town hall meetings, word of mouth, increased presence on social media, and in person demonstrations.

The Chair asked about the process for assessing these devices and if any members of the group could help support.

Alexander said outside support/resources are useful.

Kathy asked if MCB feels that we have the resources to meet the needs of our consumers in terms of AT.

Alexander SAID it is difficult for social services to ever feel that they have every resource needed to solve the challenges that they have. AT department can repurpose technology and retire older devices to replace with newer, lighter, devices.

Public Q&A

Debbie – concern about balance between money spent on surveys instead of things like AT that can directly benefit the consumers. She also questions the effectiveness of surveys and the quality of the responses.

The Commissioner mentioned that the money they are using for these surveys cannot be used just for anything. The results from previous surveys have been validated. The SR survey is going to be delivered through multiple modes of communication to reach a larger group of consumers.

Mary from Worcester – has heard about surveys for over a year and has never received one, wants to be included as she’s been a consumer for 50 years. She also wants to hear more about the assistive technology options and other general communications updates.

Commissioner confirms that the AT survey was randomized and tells the consumer to contact him directly about getting added to our contact lists.

Nonna – are there questions regarding housing on the survey?

The Commissioner said questions regarding housing are currently being considered for the SR survey.

Greg Donnelly – Carroll Center

Highlighted the importance of advocacy both from the consumers as well as providers to be able to get the funding for rehabilitation services.

Motion to adjourn.