**Virginia Board for People with Disabilities**

**Advocacy, Outreach, and Training (AOT) Committee Meeting Minutes**

***December 14, 2016***

**Committee Members Present:**

Randy Burk (Chair)

Matt Shapiro

Donna Lockwood

Ethel Paris-Gainer

Ron Lanier

Caroline Raker

Curtis Andrews

**Committee Members Absent:**

Travis Webb

Rachel Loughlin

Rose Williams

Korinda Rusinyak

**VBPD Staff Present:**

Benjamin Jarvela

Heidi Lawyer

Penni Sweetenburg-Lee

Kara White

Ronita Wilson

Amberly Millis

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Mr. Randy Burak, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:19 a.m.

Following introductions, the Chair called for a **MOTION** to approve the September Committee Minutes. Mr. Matt Shapiro made a **MOTION** to approve the September Committee Minutes; Dr. Ethel Paris-Gainer seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** carried and the September Meeting Minutes were approved as written.

**REVIEW OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING:**

The Chair reviewed the Executive Committee Meeting, noting that the September minutes had been approved. Mr. Shapiro provided an attendance report and it was noted that one member was not present for the second meeting in a row. The Chair summarized the Executive Director’s report, noting that two members of the Board were advisory stakeholders at the meeting. A personal update was provided by the Board as well, including the addition of a staff member and resignation of another. The Executive Committee also discussed the fiscal update, grant expenditures, and subcommittee agendas before adjourning.

**COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY UPDATE:**

Mr. Benjamin Jarvela, Communications Director, stated that it had been a busy quarter per usual, highlighting that a new Communications Assistant, Ms. Amberly Millis, had been hired and that program performance review (PPR) work continues. The PPR highlights document is expected to take several weeks before completion. He informed the Committee that his team is currently working on developing new materials for Partners in Policymaking (PIP) recruitment, which will be complete by December 20, 2016. He also noted that his team worked to create marketing materials for the Tidewater Alumni Association establishment meeting back in November. Next, Mr. Jarvela updated the Committee on October’s Disability History Awareness Month recognition and the social media campaign that the Board implemented.

Mr. Jarvela then explained that the agency’s rebranding is underway and that the new logo has been recolored per Board specifications. A project timeline for rollout has been developed pending the launch of the new website and is estimated to be complete by March, 2017. Mr. Jarvela stated that he is very pleased with the early design revisions and mockup of the website; he anticipates that it will be well received. Mr. Jarvela also stated that the Board member SharePoint page is largely complete and that the test server has been launched; it is expected to be available during March, 2017. Mr. Jarvela finished by explaining that the Constant Contact VITA review is ongoing due to a complication regarding an unsolicited VITA review; however he hopes to have it solved by the end of December, 2016.

**TRAINING PROGRAMS UPDATE:**

Dr. Penni Sweetenburg-Lee, Training Programs Manager, reported that three of the four Partners in Policymaking (PIP) alumni regional gatherings were successful. The alumni attendance ranged from 2-40 individuals at each gathering, with Southwest Virginia (VA) being the lowest and Central VA being the highest. Additionally, two regional chapter orientations were held for Tidewater and Northern VA. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that it was a challenge to obtain alumni attendance at the Southwest VA alumni gathering due to the difficult geography of the region. She stated that the Board is considering addressing this issue by creating more chapters and/or exploring ways to effectively use technology to facilitate more connections among alumni. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated that she would like to continue to expand the Board’s efforts to increase participation at all alumni gatherings.

Next, Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee gave a brief synopsis on the overview of the PIP program curriculum, as well as reported that all chapter officers have been selected for the Tidewater, Northern, and Central, VA chapters. She stated that several conference calls and email communication chats have been facilitated to provide agency support and guidance. She also reported that her team has found the facilities where the alumni gatherings are held to be very satisfactory and that they have formed positive relationships with the staff. All of these facilities have been at no cost and she would like for this to continue across the state.

Ms. Caroline Raker made a suggestion to reach out to alumni members and see if they are associated with any facilities that may be willing to assist with alumni gatherings as a way to reduce costs (i.e. catering or transportation). Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated that she will take the idea into consideration. Ms. Heidi Lawyer added input by stating that the Board wants to ensure that officers know of other organizations they can become involved in; the Board doesn’t want to direct alumni, but guide them. The program was just initiated and the Board needs to take time to help it grow and figure out what needs to be worked on.

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee concluded by stating that the purpose of each chapter is to reconnect both PIP and Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) alumni and to serve as the extended arms that bring them together in support of their missions in advocacy. Training programs staff will continue to support, monitor, and help develop four regional chapters in order to determine their effectiveness, viability, and to report findings/concerns to the Board for further directions. She noted that she is excited for this year because after completing her first year within her position, she now feels that she fully understands the dynamics involved and is prepared to make sure that all timelines are in order and things are completed in advance.

**PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING 2017 UPDATE:**

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated that the Board has been preparing for the 2017-2018 Partners in Policymaking (PIP) program, which will start September, 2017 and conclude April, 2018. Recruitment and registration begins December, 2016, and the deadline will be March 28, 2017. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee also shared that the Board’s training programs and communications staff have been working together to redesign the PIP application and marketing materials, which will be available on the Board’s website by December 20, 2016. She is expecting a competitive pool of applicants and wants to continue to encourage individuals to apply. Thirty PIP Partners and three alternatives will be selected from the applicant pool. Currently, the training program staff is in the process of identifying members for the selection Committee.

Mr. Burak followed up by inquiring where the PIP materials will be made available. Mr. Jarvela responded by stating that they will be posted on the website, e-news, and social media, as well as will be spread by direct communication with organizations, agencies, and representatives. He stated that it is also up to members to get it out in the community and to spread the word within their own networks.Ms. Raker expressed her concerns regarding the diversity of PIP Partners. Ms. Lawyer addressed this by restating that the Board works to increase all forms of diversity and will continue to do so; however, that it can be challenging when some communities and organizations are more active than others due to the broadness of spectrums within specific disabilities.

Next, Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee announced that the contract with the Holiday Inn Bells Road, Richmond, VA, has been renewed as the PIP facility location. Several meetings have been held with the hotel owners and sales manager to discuss evaluation results and concerns from the 2015-2016 PIP session. The most notable concern was the food provided, however the hotel’s staff is taking significant measures to address this issue and it is anticipated that there will be a significant improvement. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated that PIP sessions will be held consecutively each month. In-house staff will develop session agendas and revise project plans for development.

**TRAINING PROGRAM REVISIONS RESEARCH UPDATE:**

Ms. Lawyer shared with the Committee that she has been talking to her colleagues about pursuing a new YLF model. One potential idea that has been discussed is allowing PIP members to connect with YLF members and help out by forming an “externship” within various organizations. This development would have the purpose of building sustainability and collaboration, as well as a way to keep members connected after graduation.

Mr. Shapiro stated that he felt the externship opportunity could become a great resume booster. Ms. Lawyer responded by stating that the Board is always trying to think of new ways to move forward, this opportunity being one of those. Ms. Raker inquired if the Board would provide a list of potential organizations that members could become associated with. Ms. Lawyer ensured that yes, they would be able to connect with state, private, and regional organizations. Next, Mr. Shapiro inquired if the Board could be a potential organization; however, Ms. Lawyer explained that the Board would be unavailable due to time constraints. Ms. Raker then suggested that the Board should provide a feedback process or evaluative instrument to measure the effectiveness of the program. The Committee agreed with Ms. Raker’s suggestion.

Ms. Lawyer explained that the Board is concerned about the YLF in terms of participation and informed the Committee that a total of 19 participants graduated this year. The Board wants to improve and increase participation. Subsequently, the Board had approval to do an interagency meeting to collaborate and discuss the issue. Ms. Lawyer met with the Commissioners of Virginia’s Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired Department (DBVI), Board member John Eisenberg from the Virginia Department of Education (DOE), and the Director of the Virginia Healthy Youth Foundation to gain their support to help the Board examine and determine the best way to implement advocacy and leadership training for youth. This was a follow-up to previous discussions with the Board on the need to look at possible collaborative training and funding, as well as expanded outreach. Additionally, Mr. Ray Hopkins asked if the Board could provide training at events on self-advocacy and leadership. Ms. Lawyer felt that this would be a great way to expand reach and support to children. Mr. Burak also suggested reaching out to the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center. Ms. Lawyer stated that the Board would have to ensure that 80% of the children involved have a developmental disability; however that it was a possibility. Approval was requested by Ms. Lawyer to continue exploring different options from outside agencies and organizations in order to remodel the YLF. The Committee agreed that Ms. Lawyer should form an interagency Committee. Mr. Matthew Shapiro asked whether he could serve on the Committee and Ms. Lawyer told him he could. The Committee acknowledged upcoming changes and adaptations.

Ms. Lawyer continued by stating that the Board is assisting NACDD with a grant to improve the PIP program on a national level. Ms. Lawyer announced that she has applied to be a National Advisory of the program. She stated that this national program will ensure that the PIP curriculum is being taught in the right way, as well as will allow the Board to be a part of a much larger entity. Ms. Lawyer expects that the program will take place in January and curriculum changes will follow. Mr. Burak added input by stating that he believes this is right where the Committee wants the program to be and that it will be good to connect with other programs.

**SURVEY RESULTS:**

The Committee was briefed on the Board’s annual survey results by Mr. Jarvela and Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee. Mr. Jarvela reported that this year’s survey was sent out far and wide to both PIP and YLF training programs; more surveys were sent out than any year prior. The rate of individuals who saw the emails with the surveys attached was fairly high; however, the rate of people who completed the survey was significantly smaller. A total of 27 PIP alumni and eight YLF alumni responded. The feedback was generally positive and nothing egregious stood out.

Mr. Shapiro stated that he believes many alumni did not respond due to the length of the survey and suggested it needs to be made simpler and less time consuming. Mr. Jarvela responded to this by stating that many of the input sections were written as “optional” and that it would be challenging to make the survey shorter due to having to meet specific federal requirements. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee followed up by stating that the Board needs to develop a marketing plan to increase alumni participation, such as a way to encourage alumni chapter regionals to make survey completion a priority for their chapters. One example the Committee discussed was making survey completion into a competition at alumni gatherings. However, it was also mentioned that this would increase costs and that the return on interest would need to evaluated. Ms. Raker added input by stating that she agrees there needs to be a social element at the alumni meetings to increase participation. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated that the Board will continue to look at ways to implement the use of alumni chapters to address this issue. She concluded the discussion by explaining that the Board was given permission to hold a collaborative conference with all alumni chapters this upcoming year and that it may be a good opportunity to pursue a new strategy.

**ADJOURMENT:**

Mr. Burak **MOTIONED** for the meeting to be adjourned at 10:42 a.m. and the **MOTION** was **SECONDED** and **APPROVED**.