**Virginia Board for People with Disabilities**

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

***Sept. 12, 2018***

**Committee Members Present:**

Matthew Shapiro (Chair)

Allison Coles-Johnson

Alexandra Dixon

Ethel Paris-Gainer

Jarl Jackson

Jocelyn Kilgore

Sarah Kranz-Ciment

Alexis Nichols

**Committee Members Absent:**

Rachel Loughlin
Eric Mann

Caroline Raker

Alexus Smith

**VBPD Staff:**

Heidi Lawyer

Nia Harrison

Benjamin Jarvela

Penni Sweetenburg-Lee

Megan Weems

Ronita Wilson

Evette Wingfield-Woodley

**CALL TO ORDER:** The Chair, Mr. Matthew Shapiro called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE UPDATE:** The Chair discussed the Executive Director’s report and other issues discussed at the Executive Committee meeting including committee involvement, board member attendance, grant reviews, Board administration, and budget matters.

The Chair explained the need to appoint a committee Vice Chair and called for volunteers. Ms. Alexis Nichols volunteered to serve in the Vice Chair role. Ms. Alexandra Dixon made a **MOTION** to make Ms. Nichols the Vice Chair of Advocacy, Outreach, and Training Committee. Ms. Ethel Pairs-Gainer seconded the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** carried unanimously.

The Chair called for a **MOTION** to approve the March Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Jarl Jackson made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes and Ms. Gainer **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. The **MOTION** carried and the June meeting minutes were approved as written.

**Discussion of the 2018 Youth Leadership Academy**

Dr. Penni Sweetenburg-Lee, Director of Training Programs, explained the events and responses to the 2018 Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) were all highly positive and the program had been an enormous success. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that there was a need for volunteer staff members and suggested that the program may increase the number of staff members for future programs. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained a number of issues associated with procurement and noted the increased number of local advocates and speakers, including current Board members, all of which were well-received.

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee discussed the various program changes previously approved by the Board and highlighted the events of the YLA “Capitol Day” and the involvement of Richmond Mayor, Mr. Levar Stoney, and the opportunity for the delegates to briefly interact with the Governor. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee emphasized the impact and the importance of having legislators involved in a program dedicated to policy work and the need to strengthen the alumni and student relationships. Ms. Sarah Kranz-Ciment made a comment that she heard of the impact and success of the program from one of the lawmakers included on the panel, several months after the program had taken place. The Chair called attention to the Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee’s note of the program’s decrease in spending as a result of the shift to four days from five days, compared to previous years’ programs, and asked whether or not the quality of the program has changed based on these cost-saving tactics. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee said that the program’s quality had not suffered in any way due to the various cost saving strategies undertaken by the Training staff and that the entire YLA curriculum was covered without compromise.

**2018 YLA Program EVALUATION**

Ms. Nia Harrison, Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, guided the committee through the results of the 2018 Youth Leadership Academy program evaluation. Ms. Harrison noted that surveys were part of the self-assessment of the program, and that there was a reported increase of knowledge of advocacy and disability-rights topics among the delegates after completing the program. The Chair noted the increase of effectiveness of the program as evidenced by the survey results. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained the correlation related to the quality of presenters and the relevancy of the topics discussed. Ms. Harrison also described the positive results of the self-assessment surveys of students’ impressions of the overall quality of the program.

Ms. Harrison explained that there was a request in the survey results for fewer surveys in the future. Ms. Nichols and the Chair suggested the possibility of including a digital aspect to the program in the future to cover this need. Ms. Harrison expressed hesitation, based on the potential to add complications of accessibility with an app. Mr. Jarl Jackson suggested the use of “Survey Monkey” or a similar survey program. Mr. Benjamin Jarvela, Communications Director, explained the difficulty of involved in establishing a digital platform and organizing survey results given the volume of surveys being taken, but explained these challenges could be addressed in the context of revisions to the surveys and their quantity as discussed. The Chair noted that the cost is something that must also be taken into consideration. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee also said that logistic/planning decisions of the program is heavily based on the individual abilities of the student delegates and that impacts the overall effectiveness of the program. The committee decided to discuss at another time and address the method of introducing the surveys and feedback responses. Ms. Nichols suggested that explaining the importance of the data with participants could potentially improve survey involvement.

Ms. Harrison also noted a slight negative response towards the accommodations during the program from the delegates, but explained that this is a typical response in such a setting. Ms. Sarah Kranz-Ciment commented that this has the potential to impact application rates because of the highly communicative nature of the youth participants via social media. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that these responses do impact planning for future programs. The Chair questioned the response rate for the “sufficient number of staff,” and Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee discussed the potential of adding a larger “mentor team” to the staff list for future programs.

Ms. Nichols commented, as a small group facilitator, she did not have sufficient staff volunteers present to assist her during one session. Ms. Nichols stated that more staff/volunteers would be needed because she could not facilitate the session independently. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee sought further clarification, noting this was the first she had heard of such issues. After discussion, it was determined that assigned staff had stepped away from the room during that time and Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee stated she appreciated the concern and would make sure the number of staff would be increased in the future and that the newly instituted “Mentoring Component” would be separate from the Small Group volunteers/staff. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee also explained that Personal Care staff were hired individually to meet the needs of any Delegates or staff who required their assistance, as well as three additional PCAs and a Nurse to support other needs. She reiterated that all accommodation requests were honored and that increasing the number of attendants would be considered in the future.

The Chair suggested the introduction of a structured program staff meeting involving a daily de-brief as a way to coordinate staff activities and Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee said that would be considered in the future. Ms. Harrison noted that student and parent responses to the overall program were very positive. The Chair asked if there were any outstanding negative responses. Ms. Harrison explained that the only lower response rates were associated with accommodations and staff numbers. Ms. Nichols suggested the addition of one addition PCA staff member be included in the future programs and Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that PCA accommodations are coordinated based on the individual participant’s needs.

**Alumni Development Program Update**

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained the development of the Alumni Development Program in 2016 and the importance of the training program alumni connection for increasing grassroots advocacy efforts including organizing activities and events. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained the challenge of encouraging program alumni to volunteer their personal time to organizing the chapter’s efforts. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained the inclusion of incentives for regional Executive Teams. These teams include two co-chairs, one secretary, and two at-large members. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee reported the number of chapter meetings was reduced to three per year, from four, and that advocacy activities were being prioritized, defined, and required of each chapter this year and that a concerted effort is being made to differentiate between advocacy activities and advocacy awareness activities.

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee reported that the program is in its 3rd year and that much has been achieved and learned from the first two years and that these lessons and successes are being incorporated moving forward.  Chapter Officers were selected based on identifying and interviewing a number of Alumni from all different classes and explaining in detail the roles of the officers.  She stated that it is expected that if the officers remain throughout the entire year, the likelihood of them returning the following year would be low.

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee reported that chapter officers attended alumni leadership training sessions on August 3, 4, and 31, and that Training and Communications staff have developed an operations manual for these sessions in order to train chapter leaders on their roles and responsibilities. Ms. Nichols suggested hand-written letters of personal impact should be sent to legislators as an advocacy activity. Ms. Dixon explained that there is a six-week wait for legislators to receive hand-written letters based on threat-assessment procedures. The Chair recommended advocates using emails and phone calls to legislators for a more direct impact potential. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee agreed and explained the need to encourage alumni for more immediate response to changes in legislation and that advocacy efforts do not need to be large chapter-based events. Ms. Dixon and the Chair encouraged the development of relationships with legislative staff to push direct communications with legislators, and Ms. Dixon noted that legislative staff/legislators need just five “points of contact” based on a specific community issue in order to call notice to a community issue.

Ms. Nichols questioned the level of advocacy being directed to the state and federal level, and the need to push the idea of advocacy on a local level. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee discussed the advocacy training for the regional chapters’ executive teams that occurred in May and August of 2018. These training sessions resulted in each individual chapter developing a calendar of advocacy events, focusing on topics of importance on their individual local community levels. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted the critical component of data collection from these programs for required program performance measurements.

**Partners In Policymaking Program Update**

Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that the program was completed in April 2018. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee noted that while programs run every other year, the preparation for training programs occurs year-round. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that a Request for Proposals is being developed for hotel accommodations for the next year’s program. Ms. Kranz-Ciment questioned the number of rooms/accommodations needed. Dr. Sweetenburg-Lee explained that the class size in 30, but is difficult to pre-determine this factor because of the rotation in the individual participants and their accommodation needs. Ms. Ethel Paris-Gainer suggested the use of a four-star hotel versus three-star because of the number of ADA accommodating rooms.

**Event Support Application review**

The Chair called for the approval of the Event Support Application from the Virginia Oral Health Coalition for $2,000. Mr. Jarvela explained the details of the application and noted the applications description stated it would support Board State Plan Objective 1-3, specifically strategy 1.3.1., to “advocate for improved community based models, policies and programs to improve access to quality care.” The Chair called for comments on this application. Ms. Allison Coles-Johnson requested the inclusion of a Board member in the meetings and providing responses and data to know the overall impact of Board funded programs. Following discussion, the Chair suggested recommending the funding but at a lower budget than requested. Ms. Kranz-Ciment agreed. Ms. Jocelyn Kilgore suggested postponing a vote on a recommendation until the December Board meeting, requesting the data from the previously approved programs. Mr. Jarvela explained that the recommendation could not be tabled, because the event will occur before the next Board meeting. Following extensive discussion, with response to questions by the Director and staff, Ms. Paris-Gainer made a **MOTION** to approve the request, for the full requested budget, with the caveat of a Board member attending meetings and reporting data. Ms. Kilgore seconded the **MOTION**. Following discussion, Ms. Kranz-Ciment made an **AMENDED** **MOTION** to fund the event at $1,500. Ms. Paris-Gainer and Ms. Kilgore accepted the **AMENDED MOTION**. The **MOTION** carried.

**Communications Briefing**

Mr. Jarvela, explained the most recent work of the Communications staff. A new communications assistant was hired in August, 2018, Ms. Megan Weems. Mr. Jarvela explained that the Communications unit was involved in the Youth Leadership Academy and its training as well as ongoing procurement issues and current going marketing projects including, infographics based on the Disability Assessments and major social media campaigns for Disability History and Awareness Month (October), and Virginia’s Medicaid expansion.

**ADJOURNMENT**After calling for any additional business and hearing none, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:16 a.m.