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DAVID HICKS
Chairperson

Commission on Disabilities Minutes
May 14, 2007

Present: Dana Canevari, David Hicks, Stan Kontogiannis, Matthew Ranelli,
Linda Reeder, Heiwa Salovitz, Robin Tousey-Ayers

Absent: Marjorie Eichler, Chris Getlein, Elaine Quinn

Staff: Michelle Duprey

Guest Speaker: Iris Mellow-Barnes

Public: Delma Skinner

Iris Mellow-Barnes from the Bureau of Rehabilitation (BRS) was introduced to the Commission. She then began a presentation regarding the agency. She is from the Southern Region. She provided an overview and then questions were welcomed.

BRS receives funding from the State and Federal funds and is a program that assists people with disabilities to obtain or maintain employment. People must meet the eligibility requirement for disability. Anyone who is receiving SSI or SSDI would meet the criteria. Once determined eligible then a plan for employment is developed along with the consumer.

BRS also helps people keep their employment by providing adaptive technology, prosthetic devices or wheelchairs. People can self-refer by calling or walking in. There is usually an average of four weeks wait in between the initial call and first appointment.

Iris Mellow-Barnes then talked about initiatives at BRS. One of those is working with employers in the community so they will do on the job training. Another initiative is working with students in high school to assist in transition to work. They have another initiative which will begin in July, which is to have a BRS counselor at Connecticut Mental Health Center to work with people with significant psychiatric disabilities.

David Hicks asked a question regarding measuring successful transition. Iris Mellow-Barnes stated it is defined as being employed longer than 90 days without supports.

BRS works jointly with the One Stops. Recently the One Stops were awarded funds for a "disability navigator" which is someone who can help people with disabilities through the system.

Linda Reeder said she had attended the Employment Summit last year where attendees concluded that the largest barrier to employment for persons with disabilities is transportation. Iris Mellow-Barnes said BRS is continuing to work on transportation issues. There will soon be a website where people can go to look for transportation matches.

A long discussion then took place about employer perceptions of people with disabilities and employment discrimination. Dana Canaveri shared some of her experiences.

Iris Mellow-Barnes stated that one of the goals for 2007 is to meet with staff of the One Stop Centers and employers to customize supports.

Robin Tousey-Ayers had some questions regarding the transitions counselors. Iris Mellow-Barnes stated that counselors like to start working with students who are in their junior and seniors year, and earlier. There are 70 counselors that serve the entire state, both adults and students.

There were some additional questioning from Robin Tousey-Ayers and David Hicks, as well as a discussion about employer perceptions about persons with disabilities. Iris Mellow-Barnes also talked about the Tech Act Project and the loan program for adaptive equipment. There is also a benefits specialist available at BRS even if the individual is not a client of BRS.

Minutes

The minutes for April were reviewed. Matthew Ranelli moved to accept the minutes as written and Linda Reeder seconded. Dana Canevari abstained from voting. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chairman's Report

David Hicks reported that the House Bill concerning Disability Parking, which only increased the fines for violations, was not amended by the Judiciary Committee to include expiration date, photo-id, etc., as had been advocated by the Commission.

Department Report

Michelle Duprey reported that she had presented at two forums on Emergency Preparedness, one at the Connecticut Conference on Municipalities and one in Norwich for persons with disabilities on how to do personal planning.

She received the Community Partnership Award and was featured on Channel 8 at 7:23 a.m. on live TV for the award which was sponsored by Marrakech, Inc.

Michelle Duprey will be on medical leave to have knee surgery and will be out until the end of June.

David Hicks reported that Marjorie Eichler will not be attending the Commission meetings nor renewing her position on the Commission in July.

Old Business

- ADA Anniversary

There was discussion regarding approaching the Criterion Cinema to show the movie "Murderball" for the ADA Anniversary. Stan Kontogiannis will contact the Cinema and make plans at the New Haven Library if the Cinema is not an option. This was made into a motion by Linda Reeder which was seconded by David Hicks and unanimously approved.

Linda Reeder will create a media kit, and Michelle Duprey has not heard back from the Spokebenders.

- Housing Committee

Linda Reeder reported on her phone conversation with Bill Howell of HUD. Because the process of the 504 Review is not complete yet, the Freedom of Information Act request the Commission made does not apply. HUD has issued a Letter of Finding and is preparing a voluntary compliance agreement for the HANH. Once HANH accepts the compliance agreement HUD will make the 504 report public. HUD will send a copy to the Commission as a courtesy.

- Board of Education

Robin Tousey-Ayers went to Board of Aldermen meeting and inquired about the Board of Education budget. She was trying to surmise if they were going to rehire aides for the next fiscal year. They did not know where in the budget the line item for the teacher aid positions was located. She said that the BOA implied that they did not have much control over the matter.

- Transportation Committee

Heiwa Salovitz reported on the last meeting. He inquired of Michelle Duprey who should be contacted regarding the Committee's concerns. She replied there is an ADA Committee which would be the appropriate forum. Heiwa reported that 2 people from Yellow Cab attended the meeting and were very interested in the Standard Taxi. There was some discussion about grants and incentives and it was concluded that more research needs to be conducted to that end.

New Business

No new business

Other business

No other business

Announcements

Matt Ranelli was appointed to the Commission on Deaf and Hearing Impaired by the Governor. He will report back on issues from there.

Elaine Quinn will be gone until August.

Dana Canevari made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Robin Tousey Ayers. The meeting adjourned.