

AVIT Minutes– December 12, 2019

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Emily Coleman, Secretary, TSBVI/ AERBVI
Mary Ann Siller, Treasurer, TVI
Rona Pogrund, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)
Shannon Darst, SFASU TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)
Maricela Garza, ESC 2, Associate member
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI
Neva Fairchild, American Foundation for the Blind
Susie Welsh, DBMAT
Linda Jordan, TVI/ COMS, associate member
Kate Borg, TSBVI
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC

Note: there is an acronym list at the end for help in following these notes!

A. Cyral Miller called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

B. Approval of minutes

Rona Pogrund moved to approve minutes and Neva Fairchild seconded. The minutes of the Sept. 5, 2019 meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported via email that AVIT currently has \$4,234.12 in the bank. There have been zero deposits and zero withdrawals.

New Business/Announcements

C. Updates

Legislative Updates

NFB Legislative Alerts: Cyral Miller suggested reaching out again to NFB to see if they want to participate in AVIT. Two issues were recently included in their national alert list, nfbnet-members-list@nfbnet.org: One was the "Access Technology Affordability Act," House Resolution (HR) 2086, sponsored by Mike Thompson, Senate Bill (S) 815, sponsored by John Boozman, which includes a refundable tax credit for purchasing technology. It has many

sponsors in the House and the Senate. Second item was applauding introduction of the “Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education Act, also known as the Aim High Act.” (H.R. 5312). This promotes accessible technology within higher education by authorizing a commission to develop accessibility criteria for materials used in colleges and universities for students with print disabilities.

Cyral shared TX history with the Cogswell-Macy Act. AVIT has supported this legislation in the past. Several DBMAT families have gone to Washington DC and been supporters in the past, and many Texans helped write letters and make calls. There are three main components that increase educational access for students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH), blind or visually impaired, and DeafBlind. Emily shared that the Act has been reintroduced, and many national organizations are gearing up to help legislators understand the importance of the issues. Advocacy days are planned in DC on February 26th and March 25th. For those of us in Texas, participation can also be effective by contacting Texas Senators or Representatives by phone on the same day that others are physically in Washington DC. You can also set-up meetings with them or their aides in local offices in Texas. There is a terrific website with lots of information and current updates at cogswellmacyact.org.

HHSC, Karissa Sanchez

HHSC requested online feedback for their legislative appropriation (means money) request (LAR) for the next biennium, with many respondents. Listening sessions from HHSC are happening around the state as well. Stakeholders are being asked about services they’re receiving and how to improve. You can sign up online to receive notifications from the agency to stay informed about HHSC initiatives at this address: <https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/TXHHSC/subscriber/new>. They are working on transparency and improvement. The final listening session in San Antonio will be January 15th. Karissa will forward information details to AVIT members.

The Blind Children’s Program (BCP) is updating their stakeholder database, and increasing communication with parents and partner stakeholder groups. Potential parent newsletter in the spring which will focus on the BCP. Cyral suggested HHSC advertise TX SenseAbilities, the joint TSBVI/HHSC/TWC newsletter and other resources. It is available in English and Spanish and audio versions online and you can sign up for paper versions, in English and Spanish, at <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities>.

AFB, Neva Fairchild

AFB Leadership Conference will be held in Arlington, VA on March 26 and 27 at the Crystal Gateway Marriott. Multiple tracks are being offered for leadership, education, aging, and more.

The Aging & Vision Loss National Coalition (AVLNC) subcommittees are Awareness, Funding & Personnel and those interested in services for older people with vision loss are encouraged to get involved and join a committee. Contact me at nfairchild@afb.org to learn more or express interest in AVLNC.

The Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee (ATWAC is seeking new members). Neva has the application and can forward it to anyone who is interested.

Neva attended the Vision Serve conference in November, which was conversations driven by audience members instead of having presenters in formal sessions. Neva emphasized the value in having people with multiple perspectives and differing expertise all contributing to the topical discussions. More information about the VisionServe Alliance is available at <https://visionservealliance.org/>.

The Rehabilitation Council in Texas and TWC are setting up 5-6 listening sessions throughout Texas for the 3-year state plan that will go to WIOA and VR for approval.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman & Kate Borg

Emily discussed this coming year's Summer Programs and the schedule, which is set for 4 weeks this year. TSBVI is hoping to increase students served from 177 last summer to 275 this summer. In 2021, TSBVI is researching options to increase offerings to 5 or 6 weeks, but this is dependent on ability to find staff. The Board recently approved revisions of the vision, mission, philosophy, and long-range goals as part of their strategic planning process. Emphasis was placed on indicating TSBVI serves the entire state of Texas, all 11,000 students identified as blind, VI, or DeafBlind. TSBVI mission statement also highlights the importance of empowering students and increasing their ability to demonstrate agency in their own lives.

TSBVI has held many on-campus events that have included a talent show, farmer's market, jingle bell run, national goalball championships, and more to come next week including "The Big Show" on Dec. 18 from 9:30-11:30. Communications across TSBVI continue to improve with a monthly TechCats newsletter, a quarterly parent newsletter called "The Wildcat Times" and a short monthly video from Emily titled "The Electrifying News." This is all in addition to the many ways Outreach is already communicating. Yesterday, Emily and four staff members who are focused on transition went to the Austin Lighthouse to tour their facility and discuss future collaborations. TSBVI is continually trying to engage with new partners and in new ways with those we already know.

Kate Borg discussed updates of social media efforts to consolidate our programs and encouraged us to "like" the TSBVI Facebook page. TX SenseAbilities' latest newsletter is being mailed out in paper now and is already available online at <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-senseabilities>. The SWOMA conference was held in the first part of November with an oversold crowd. Texas Focus will be in Houston in February 27-29 with an emphasis on self-determination. A small amount of money may be available to assist with family travel. Registration is open now at <https://www.tsbvi.edu/tx-focus-info>. The Game of Life conference starts today, which is a collaboration of Short-Term Programs and Outreach Programs.

AERBVI, Neva Fairchild & Emily Coleman

Emily announced the Call for Papers is out for the 2020 AER International Conference to be held in St. Louis July 22-26. The call for papers is available at the [AERBVI website](#). AER's

online webinars called “Power-Ups” have been a huge success and some have filled to capacity. This is currently for members only. AER is also partnering with CEC and Perkins to offer more professional development access for our members. Also working with CEC on the Cogswell Macy Act and on rewriting CEC DeafBlind standards. In addition, we’re in conversations with NFB about potential collaborations.

Neva Fairchild added AER is having a membership drive right now and if you are an AER member encourage your colleagues to join. If they add your name to their application, you’ll have a chance to win a \$500 gift card! Neva also shared AER’s interest in pursuing grant money for projects moving forward.

TAER, Rona Pogrund

TAER Conference will be held in San Marcos April 2-4 and in Denton in 2021. Deadline for proposal submissions is December 18 and that is also the deadline for award nominations. Registration is also open at <http://www.txaer.org/conference.html>. If anyone is interested in participating on the board, they should contact [Rona Pogrund](#).

DBMAT, Susie Welch

DBMAT sent feedback to HHSC on their Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR). They asked for an increase in the salary cap for interveners, family professional development support, and face-to-face monitoring from individuals educated in working with people who are DeafBlind to make programming suggestions.

TUPVI - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrund and Shannon Darst

TTU: TTU received so many applicants for spring, that some were turned away due to funding limits. Project INVITE grant will be implemented in summer and planning will happen this spring. This program includes study of neurological visual impairment and requires acquisition of a master’s degree. They will have 15 students across four states. The CATSI grant ends this year.

Teacher of Students who are DeafBlind certification continues to move through the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC). Chris Montgomery took the lead with the statewide committee that developed the standards. These standards recently came up for discussion at SBEC and there was no vote, but that will be in the months to come. At future SBEC meetings we’ll need stakeholder support when public comment opens. Once the standards are approved, test writing will begin for the TExES, the test teachers will have to take to get this certificate. TTU already has coursework that will need to be aligned with the new standards.

SFASU: Shannon reported they are working on developing coursework for the Teacher of the DeafBlind potential program. She has encouraged students to present at TAER and to become members.

East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Ann Phillips

Quarterly partnership meetings with Region 7, 8, TWC, and HHSC are helping everyone to work smarter. The ET Lighthouse is interested in being involved with TSBVI for future projects as they have something to offer, too. Ann expressed interest in aging activities brought up by Neva Fairchild.

Linda Jordan

Since the ALD screening has been implemented in Texas, 250 individuals have been identified in 14 states. (Note, during the meeting Linda had a higher number but subsequently got additional information). This means 250 families who were able to begin treatment immediately and hopefully stop the progression of the disease! Wonderful news, and great to know that Texas has become one of these states that test.

SightSavers - Matthew Daw submitted the following update via email:

SightSaversAmerica will have two clinics early next year in San Antonio and the Texas Hill Country (no date yet). We will provide CCTV's for adults and children at both clinics. They plan to have several clinics next Fall 2020. Sight Savers America will have another large Dallas/Ft. Worth clinic, and will need SEVERAL children ages 4-18, who would benefit from a CCTV in the home. They will also have clinics in San Antonio, Austin, Houston, and the Rio Grande Valley. If anyone would like to refer a child to this program from the areas listed, feel free to do so. You can contact Matthew Daw at mdaw@sightsaversamerica.org. Their information release forms will be attached to the email with the notes.

D. OTHER NEW BUSINESS:

Agency/Organization Updates

Sad to announce that our former representative from TEA, Dr. Vicki DePountis, lost her battle with cancer on November 21, 2019. This is a great loss to our field and we are awaiting TEA action on posting her position.

E. FUTURE MEETING DATES:

The next meeting date is **March 5th 2019**. AVIT meetings are from 10-12.

Future meeting dates have not yet been set.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.

F. Acronyms!

There are a lot of shortcut acronyms used in these notes. Here's a handy cheat sheet:

AVIT - Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans

BCVDDP - Blind children's vocational discovery and development program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

DB - DeafBlind

ESC - Education Service Center

HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission

HR - human resources (personnel)

IL - independent living programs

IT - information technology (technology services)

LAR - Legislative Appropriation Request

NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

OIB - Older Individuals who are Blind

O&M – orientation and mobility

RCT – Rehabilitation Council of Texas

SFA or SFASU – Stephen F. Austin State University

SSP - Support Service Provider

TEA - Texas Education Agency

TSBVI - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TTU – Texas Tech University

TUPVI – Texas University Professors in Visual Impairment

TWC - Texas Workforce Commission

TWS - Texas Workforce Solutions

VR - vocational rehabilitation

WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the legislation that governs much of the vocational rehabilitation moneys from the Federal government