

AVIT Minutes– September 5, 2019

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Emily Coleman, Secretary, TSBVI
Rona Pogrud, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)
Shannon Darst, SFASU TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)
Maricela Garza, ESC 2, associate member
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC Blind Children's Program
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

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

Neva moved to approve minutes and Shannon Darst seconded. The minutes of the June 13, 2019 meeting were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported via email that AVIT currently has \$4,234.12 in the bank. There has been one deposit of \$136 and zero withdrawals.

Cyral Miller will be checking in with Mary Ann to determine if this is a year that dues will be collected. The bi-annual dues are \$50 and associate members have been \$10 in the past.

New Business/Announcements

C. Updates

HHSC Blind Children's Program, Kathleen Gale

Reviewing BCP over the past year and services provided. Three areas include case management, parent education, and direct skills training beginning September 1. Developing leadership structure since departure from DARS. Filling vacancies and hiring as much as we can and hoping to be fully staffed by the end of the fiscal year. We continue to use the "Big 6"

when assessing families for needs. Continue to partner with TVI and schools to ensure instruction happening at happen.

ALD Newborn Screening, Linda Jordan

Laura Jordan provide an update on ALD Newborn screening. During the last legislature approved a bill with 7.9 million in funding to mandate screening, which began on August the 5th. On August 23rd the first baby was identified. A quote from a mother of an older child with ALD, "This diagnosis is traumatic, but he will have a chance at life." She thanks AVIT for the letters of support we sent as part of the legislative campaign.

TWC, Juanita Barker

Juanita Barker, TWC: Numbers have dropped in clients served and they are wondering if people still are having trouble finding TWC or client services. Juanita is willing to provide training to stakeholders to connect clients to services and further defining who qualifies. Juanita's email is: juanita.barker@twc.state.tx.us. Recently they added a category called "severe visual impairment" which relies on how a person functions, and not just visual acuity. If a person was served as a student with visual impairment in the school system, TWC will accept that person for rehabilitation services. She requested that all AVIT members help get the message out across the state. Cyral suggested we print an article about TWC eligibility and services in the TX SenseAbilities newsletter.

In addition, as of Sept. 3 some of the rates for providers have increased. O&Ms are now paid \$75/ hour, Independent Living Skills trainers will be paid \$75/ hour, and Diabetes educator pay has increased to \$117/ hr. Diabetes educators are most often RNs or dietitians. Open enrollment for contractor providers will be at the end of September. TWC will reimburse mileage costs at the Federal rate after the first 50 miles driven. Here is a link with more information: <https://twc.texas.gov/manuals/revisions/vr-standards-for-providers-revisions.html>

The Older Blind program is for those over 55, while for people under the age of 50 who are not interested in employment, many of the Independent Living Centers in Texas now offer services through the HHSC.

Here's some info about TWC VI eligibility that Juanita shared via an email:

TWC has added a third category of severe visual impairment. An applicant's vision might be better than 20/70, but he/she has functional issues and with this new category, that applicant would meet the definition of a person with a visual impairment for VR services. An example is a student who is served as VI by a school district.

Please share the following information from the VR manual with all who need this information:

Individuals with visual impairments that create a substantial impediment to employment may be eligible for VR services. TWC-VR recognizes the following three categories of visual impairments:

- Blindness - visual acuity with best correction of 20/200 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 20 degrees or less; or a combination of both.
- Low Vision- visual acuity with best correction of 20/70 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 30 degrees or less in the better eye; or a combination of both.
- Significant Visual Impairment - A disease or condition of the eye that does not meet the definitions of Blind or Low Vision but does create a significant impediment to employment and cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses.

The "visual acuity" to be used is the best corrected distance acuity.

"Best correction" is the best visual acuity obtained with a simple refraction (glasses or contact lenses), not with a low vision aid, such as a telescopic aid.

An ophthalmologist or optometrist must

- measure the visual acuity using the distance Snellen chart, or
- measure and then convert the measurement to the distance Snellen equivalent in writing.

AFB, Neva Fairchild

In October, AFB is hosting an employment summit in Dallas with employers to focus on "knowledge-based" jobs and develop an action plan. Working with AbilityOne to focus on the employment of people with disabilities. Strides on aging initiative to complete environmental scan and find gaps. Four primary areas for the initiative work:

- service delivery consistency,
- job retention for those losing their vision,
- lack of adoption of high-tech solutions, and
- transportation.

AFB will focus first on transportation. First phase of report is posted on the AFB website at afb.org. Looking at public transit organizations across the nation who are partnering with ride-sharing companies to provide para-transit. Gathering information in the hopes of encouraging other transportation providers to embrace ride-share opportunities.

AFB Leadership Conference in Arlington, VA will be held in March 2020; aging, education, employment, technology, and leadership tracks. An agenda with presenters and topics should be up in the next few weeks.

In regards to her role with Rehabilitation Council of Texas, TWC is undergoing rehabilitation monitoring. The monitoring visit is in two weeks. Neva is wrapping up her role of RCT Chair in November. Feeling positive about the results of this monitoring review.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman & Kate Borg

Emily shared that she moved into Superintendent role on August 1 and Kate Borg became Outreach Director. If you'd like to learn more about Kate, Emily recommended you listen to the latest episode of our podcast "[A Sense of Texas](#)." Kids returned to campus on August 18 and had a smooth registration day. Today is the beginning of the first Short-Term Program offering of the year. White Cane Day will be held at TSBVI on October 16th. Emily is looking into how to share t-shirt ordering information throughout the state.

Kate shared that the Teacher of students who are DeafBlind (TDB) Pilot program is up and running with the first meeting in September. October will be first mentor center. TX Focus is happening in February in Houston with a Self-Determination theme. November 13 will be this year's DeafBlind Advanced Practitioner training with Paul Hart from Scotland. TDB Certification standards are being written with the TEA representative yesterday. Standards will be presented to SBEC Board in December. This is a very exciting initiative!

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. There is a call for papers out now and available at the [AERBVI website](#). AER is also starting a new professional development offering for members called "Power Ups" and more info will be shared in September. Neva mentioned that TSBVI hosted the AER Board this summer for a meeting on campus. She has a heightened appreciation of the work done by TSBVI.

Legislative Update, Cyral Miller

Pertaining to work removing "functional blindness" from state legislation. The TX Administrative Code needs to change to reflect the new language in the education law. Service center VI consultants are meeting to determine ways to update and inform districts.

Additional change happening with removing the word "severe" from eligibility for VI statements in TX Administrative Code. This is related to guidance from an OSEP memo. Mari added that TAC and Commissioner Rules are waiting for all the information needed to make the needed changes.

TAER, Michael Munro

Conference planning going well. Re-writing bylaws and standards behind the scenes. Shannon participated in national AER chapter meetings to discuss increasing membership. Conference

in San Marcos April 2-4 and in Denton in 2021. Working on getting more volunteers to help out at the conference to do sub-committee work, etc. Great collaborative effort so far.

DBMAT, Susie Welch

DBMAT had a really good year, and got pay raises for the whole DeafBlind Multiple Disabilities (DBMD) Medicaid Waiver program. HHSC is working on how to implement the pay raises, so the timeline is unknown. Back pay may have to be implemented as needed. Electronic timekeeping being put in place for the Waiver.

Sept. 27-29 is DBMAT family conference in Wimberley, TX this year. In October they are hosting a golf tournament to raise money for interveners to take classes. It's October 18, and the tee-off will be around noon. TouchBase in Houston has moved and they are having their grand opening on October 19.

TUPVI - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrud and Shannon Darst

Rona Pogrud: TTU wrote a grant this summer pertaining to NVI and training professionals, but they haven't heard the result. Starting a new CVI course this spring. Recruited Dr. Charles Farnworth from New York's International Institute for the Brain (iBrain) to teach the course who has extensive experience with children who have NVI.

TTU took in 21 new students for Reach Across Texas this fall. A lot of new students in TVI/O&M areas. Been working on DB standards. National data collection cohort (NPTP project) still moving forward and survey being sent out this fall to gain more knowledge about university preparation programs across the country. Seeking IRB approval from Portland State to do more research. Continuing to seek funding for child count information and other data gathering.

Shannon Darst: SFASU has undergone a few changes. Dr. Munro is now at Region 6 and Shannon has taken on the Program Director position. The VI/OM department is in college of education under new leadership. Wrote a grant proposal for their O&M program and are awaiting word on funding. 17 new students joined through their Texas grant and 10 new students through their federal grant. Starting a new ECC course that has already been approved to start in the spring. Proposal to offer three new DB courses working through the approval process in the next year as they prepare for the creation of a DB certification.

East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Amy Anderson

Just about finished being vendors for the state with O&M and Independent Living. Now are picking the contracts back up for Assistive Technology training. The Lighthouse has a program called PROMOTE through National Industries for the Blind for teaching Microsoft Office for JAWS and Zoomtext users. Rona shared that an article was recently approved to be published in JVIB about this program. Every lighthouse is a separate entity, although periodically the CEOs get together. Some lighthouse organizations only take referrals from the state, but Tyler takes any clients.

D. OTHER NEW BUSINESS:

Agency/Organization Updates

Neva has asked question about the approval of Bill of Rights and Cyral will follow-up with MaryAnn to send out the vote proposal to AVIT members. Emily shared that she had gotten a few requests to make changes, and it cannot be edited at this time due to approval already taking place with the document "as is" from other organizations. In the future if editing takes place, we will take concerns into account. Emily shared that the document has been translated into Vietnamese and Spanish by the California School for the Blind and will be shared on the AERBVI website.

E. FUTURE MEETING DATES:

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

Future meeting date is **March 5th 2019**.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:23 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)

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