

AVIT Meeting Minutes – June 21, 2022

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Emily Coleman, Secretary
Mary Ann Siller, North Texas Professionals, Treasurer
Susie Welsh, DBMAT
Dr. Rona Poggrund, TTU/TAER Past-President/ TUPVI
Nicholas Trotter, TEA
Lee Sonnenberg, All Blind Children of TX and AER
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach and TAER
Dr. Carolyn Carman, Envision Dallas
Michael Munro, Region 6
Yolanda Shaw, TSBVI Outreach
Linda Hulett, TAPVI
Will Walsh, Houston Lighthouse

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

Cyral Miller called the meeting to order on ZOOM at 10:06 a.m.

Approval of minutes

Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes and Mary Ann Siller motioned and Susie Welch seconded and all approved of the March 2022 minutes.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller emailed our Treasurer's report this morning. Our current balance is \$3769.97 with no deposits or withdrawals to report. Mary Ann reminded the membership that we've asked for \$50 membership dues bi-annually in the past, typically in January, so we may want to consider in future meetings.

New Business

None noted.

Agency/Organization Updates

TEA, Nicholas Trotter

No new updates specific to B/VI/DB. Working to get grants published for the next grant cycle. SSVI application should go live tomorrow. TEA continues to work on DB teacher certification and requirements for who is eligible, which will likely align with TSVI per preliminary discussions. Annual census data has been collected via grant funding and Nicholas shared where to find the data on the TSBVI website at <https://www.tsbvi.edu/db-child-count-vi-registration>. He gave an overview of the data showing about a 2% drop in total students identified.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman & Kate Borg

Kate shared that an Ed Action subcommittee will be looking at improving identification and evaluation. Emily talked about recruitment and retention efforts and TSBVI's need to delay student start dates due to staff shortages. TSBVI will be having an in-house brainstorming session tomorrow to determine if there are new ways to build capacity with the people already hired. The 87th session formed a Commission on Special Education Funding and they have been meeting this year to reimagine SPED funding in Texas. They've asked TSBVI to present on its funding and services on June 27th. TSBVI is writing their LAR and will have more information available in September. In addition, TSBVI's new website will launch next week.

Dr. Carolyn Carmen, Envision Dallas

First, she invited all of us to visit and tour Envision Dallas if we haven't been there recently. They are expanding all kinds of programs with about 150 people who are B/VI working there and 3 individuals dedicated to technology training along with a full-time O&M. Services are being expanded now that other areas are going well. The call center continues to expand, the low vision program is growing, low vision rehab program training, and Esther's Place still holds programs. They also have collaborative programs with TSBVI.

214-420-6548

Carolyn.Carman@envisionus.com

Texas University Professionals in VI (TUPVI) - TTU update, Rona Pogrud

Dr. Shannon Darst is leaving SFASU this summer and won't be returning in the fall. Dr. Heather Munro will be taking the lead in the VIP program following her recent approval of tenure status. TTU accepted 12 new students for reach across Texas and have about 5 additional self-pay. TTU has about 13 applicants for fall. There are 17 new students accepted through Project Invite second cohort. Most of the first cohort is finishing in August with their Masters and either TSVI or COMS. Project Invite is a collaborative grant with multiple states participating. O&M weekend was completed on campus this month with temperatures over 100 degree, much to the chagrin of the northern states participating.

An open faculty position is being advertised and TTU is seeking candidates who are dually certified in VI and O&M, and they must have their doctorate. TTU hoping to hire by the end of

October. They will be recruiting at AER and beyond this summer. In addition, Dr. Pogrud, Dr. Darst, and Dr. Michael Munro received the Dr. Corinne Kirshner research award at AFBLC in Washington, DC for their work on the VISSIT.

Next year, 2023, will be the 30th anniversary of AVIT!

Will Walsh, Houston Lighthouse

The Lighthouse recently launched an AT training and Will has been moved into the full-time AT role. They partnered with TWC and their clients and counselors to receive service authorizations for training. Will is approved to train on JAWS, ZoomText, Fusion, iOS, current braille displays, and notetakers. Baseline assessment provided along with 40 hours of training. Contact info is wwalsh@houstonlighthouse.org and his number is 713-284-8446.

DBMAT, Suzie Welch

Legislative action being worked on leading into the next session. Discussing requesting an increase in slots within the DBMD waiver. They'd prefer to get an increase of 25 slots per year until the interest list is eliminated. There are over 300 names on the list and due to importance of early intervention, we need children to get services. Also requesting an increase in the cap for DBMD waiver related to allowable budget as it hasn't been increased in ten years. Research being done specific to inflation to determine an amount to request.

DBMAT has asked if AVIT would cosign on their agenda and Cyral stated this has already been voted on and approved in the past, which was confirmed by Rona and Mary Ann. Therefore, AVIT can continue as a co-signer without another vote. The membership present agreed and Cyral requested DBMAT keep us posted on hearing dates and more, so AVIT members can advocate on their behalf. Mary Ann reminded DBMAT to email AVIT members the legislative agenda.

HHSC - BCP, Karissa Sanchez

Ten deafblind children enrolled in BCP services attended a weekend camp in late April in Center Point, Texas, at Camp Camp (the Children's Association for Maximum Potential (CAMP)). The CAMP staff and BCP DeafBlind specialists collaborated to develop individualized activities for each child to match their unique needs. The Camp focused on increasing a variety of skills for the children in attendance with their families and siblings, including fine and gross motor skills, communication, choice-making and independent living skills. This was achieved through opportunities such as wood painting, ceramics, horseback riding, archery, outdoor cooking, canoeing and much more.

On June 4, the BCP team hosted a direct skills training focused on art and independent living skills. Children who attended had an opportunity to learn about and improve their independent living skills and fine arts skills. They created salt dough magnets and jewelry as well as decorative steppingstones.

And BCP is hosting the first-ever DeafBlind Awareness Week Art Show: titled Empowerment Through Art with an in-person art opening this Friday June 24 from 10–11 a.m. in the North Austin Complex. The art will remain for viewing until July 8 located on the first floor of the Health and Human Services Commission North Austin Complex (4601 W. Guadalupe Street, in Austin.) They will also host a virtual art opening, Monday June 27th from 11-11:45. There is open registration for both events and AVIT members are invited to join to celebrate our deafblind children.

Also, HHSC continues to struggle to hire staff in Abilene, Amarillo, Lubbock and San Antonio. If you know anyone qualified please refer them to the HHSC jobs website:
<https://jobshportal.hhsc.state.tx.us/ENG/careerportal/default.cfm?>

HHSC continues to focus staff training on the provision of direct skills training for children and parents. This includes emergency preparedness training and future planning training.

They have seen a decline in referrals during the pandemic. Schools have also seen a decline in children identified with visual impairments. HHSC will be part of the workgroup with TEA, TSBVI and ECI to focus on child find activities. The program is also working on an increased public awareness campaign for FY23.

In the Independent Living Services Program, they received a good response to the stakeholder survey that was conducted by PRC. The survey was conducted to inform the legislatively required study of the ILS program. The survey data and results will be used to complete the ILS Study and report that is due to the legislature on December 2, 2022.

AVIT members are encouraged to visit the HHSC website hhs.texas.gov for presentations and reports and you can sign up for GovDelivery if you have not already done so which can be found in the top right corner of the HHSC webpage and by clicking subscribe. You can also reach out to Karissa directly anytime with questions or assistance at her email address:
Karissa.sanchez@hhs.texas.gov

Linda Hulett, TAPVI

Main focus right now is to get their name back out there and increase family engagement. Social media campaign has been increased through Facebook and in person events are starting again in the Houston area. They are willing to attend events to meet people or display information.

Lee Sonnenberg, All Blind Children Texas

Seeking to hire a new program administrator that will be a contract position. They're looking to hire a part-time person living in the Austin area due to fundraising opportunities and access to resources. Lee will share the job description with AVIT. Need help processing grant requests, grant applications, and administrative support for the ABC Board.

Lee Sonnenberg, AER

Lee started as the New Executive Director of AER last week. He has started working with the conference committee on the International event this summer in St. Louis July 20-24, 2022.

His new email is lee@aerbvi.org. Lee plans to meet with as many leadership folks this month to get a good understanding of the organization and where they want to go. After the conference, he wants to focus on moving forward and supporting membership as much as possible.

Sight Savers

Two 2 CCTV donation clinics are being offered this summer in different parts of the state.

Thursday, July 28th

Center for Vision Health

5442 La Sierra Dr.

Dallas, TX 75231

8:00AM-4:00PM

They will assist around 40 children with high-tech vision aids.

Wednesday, August 17th

Region One Education Service Center

1900 Schunior St.

Edinburg, TX 78541

8:30AM-3:30PM

They will assist around 20 children with high-tech vision aids.

Discussion/Announcements

No announcements noted. Cyral re-stated that we will support DBMAT's legislative agenda and other agency's will share their legislative priorities/ appropriation requests as they are available. Mary Ann also asked for members to contact her with membership contact information updates at dmasiller@sbcglobal.net and she'll also send a reminder via the listserv.

Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date is **Tuesday, September 6th**. AVIT meetings are from 10-12.

Mary Ann Siller motioned to adjourn the meeting and Rona Pogrund seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.

A. 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 (or BCP) - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC
CEC - Council for Exceptional Children
CILS - Center for Independent Living Services
COMS - Certified orientation and mobility specialist
CVI - Cortical Visual Impairment
DB - Deafblind
ESC - Education Service Center
FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions
HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission
HR - human resources (personnel)
IL - independent living programs
IT - information technology (technology services)
LAR – Legislative Appropriation Request (request for state funding)
NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind
NVI - Neurological visual impairment (often referred to as CVI)
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
STP - Short Term Programs at TSBVI
TDB - Teacher of students who are Deafblind
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