

MINUTES OF MEETING
BOARD OF GEORGIA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
HELD
TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2012
AT
TWO PEACHTREE STREET
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Greg Kirk
Jimmy DeFoor
Sandy Adams
Don Parks
Marsha Farrow
Louise Hill
Fay Loggins
Amy O'Dell

BOARD MEMBER ABSENT:

Robert Green

The first Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board meeting was called to order by Greg Schmiege, Executive Director of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). He thanked everyone for coming. After officially calling the meeting to order, Mr. Schmiege proceeded to the first order of business which is to ask for a roll call of the Board members. He asked each Board member to give a short introduction. Mr. Schmiege acknowledged that each board member come with great passion for persons with disabilities and a strong desire to serve the citizens of Georgia. He also pointed out that his primary desire is for the business of the new GVRA is to be a transparent agency and Board.

Each of the Board members present introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their respective backgrounds.

Louise Hill

Ms. Hill is from Athens, GA and works in the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute, which is a public service outreach program of Georgia. She stated that she had an opportunity to work all over Georgia in leadership and community development programs. Ms. Hill comes with experience as she had a relative who was not officially diagnosed but had a disability. She was heavily involved with his care. Ms. Hill has learned a lot in the past 12 – 18 months about having a disability and negotiating back to work. VR is very helpful in that process. I am here both as a receiptant and an advocate.

Greg Kirk

Mr. Kirk is a licensed professional counselor and worked for many years in the field of developmental disabilities. He has provided case management for approximately 3,200 people with developmental disabilities across the state. He has a blended 17 year old son with a developmental disability, and he just got his driver's license. We are really proud of him. Mr. Kirk advocates for families with disabilities. He believes sometimes you have to push the system a little bit. He has been known to do that over the years. Mr. Kirk is glad to be on this Board and has high expectations and hopes for the Board. Thank you for the honor to serve.

Sandy Adams

Ms. Adams is a school educator in the school system for approximately 30 years. She created a club called Friends Helping Friends, which provides for students with disabilities. The children go all over the state to places where they would not have been able to go. What she thought would be a 30 member club has turned out to be approximately 200 high school students begging to help. The club has beauty pageants, tons of fill fun days and a lot of interactive things to do with the students. She considers herself blessed, and the high school students that assist my students have been blessed. Many students have decided to go into special education because of their involvement with this club. She is honored to be here. Ms. Adams is concerned about where the students are going to go and what they are going to do when they graduate. She will like to be involved to find something for them to do after graduation.

Marsha Farrow

Ms. Farrow is from a little town in Georgia named Summerville. She is currently employed as a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist with the Vision Rehabilitation Services in Smyrna, GA. During her tenure with the State Merit System, she worked with multiple types of people with disabilities, from developmental disabilities, health and substance abuse. She is excited about the Board. This is a day that we have been waiting on for a long time in order to bring rehabilitation services to where it needs to be as well as to meet all the various needs out there. She is honored to be able to serve.

Amy O'Dell

Ms. O'Dell is the founding director of Jacob's Ladder. It is a school named after her son, Jacob. She learned from Jacob that so much is possible when given the right attention, opportunity and the right tools. We serve approximately 4,000 students at the school, and it is a one on one environment. The goal of the school is to give each child tools, methodology, time, attention, love, structure in order to be successful. My interest now is taking the children and finding the next best fit for them. This is truly a fantastic time and honor for me to be able to join this group of people who have the same vision to create a future for people with disabilities whether it is physical, mental, emotional or behavioral. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Don Parks

Mr. Parks taught school at the high school and college level. He served 34 years with Rehabilitation Services and retired as a district director. His district served approximately 9,300 people a year. After retiring he worked with the US House of Representatives. He looks forward to returning to work with people with disabilities in this new capacity.

Jimmy DeFoor

Mr. DeFoor's interest in serving people with disabilities began early as he grew up with a family member who had a disability. His first job was with a head start program where he met young people with developmental problems. After graduating from college, a relative suggested that he seek employment with Vocational Rehabilitation. He began working with the Department of Education in 1969 as a vocational intern then the agency moved to the Department of Human Resources. Shortly before retiring, the agency moved again to the Department of Labor where he retired as an Assistant Commissioner. He is extremely honored to be on this Board and able to give back just a little bit of what Rehabilitation Services has given him. He looks forward to working with this Board to help do everything it can to support people in the field and people with disabilities make this program the very best in can be.

Fay Loggins

Mr. Loggins is an attorney who works in Gainesville, GA. He is a recipient of Georgia's Rehabilitation Services in Warm Springs where he learned to live as a blind person. He attended college and then went on to law school at the University of Georgia. He has now been practicing law for approximately 20 years, and his son is his law partner. He served on a Board in Gainesville for approximately 12 years as a member of the Board of Directors, President and Vice President. That organization is now known as the Disability Resource Center. It assisted people with disabilities with home and van modifications. Mr. Loggins always had an interest in helping others to receive the same advantages as he received. On many occasions, not in an official capacity, he has had the opportunity to counsel others who suffer with visual impairments to adjust to life as a blind person. He is looking forward to working with this group and hopes the Board can make Rehabilitation Services a more productive and available service to those people in our community who need these services so badly. He is honored and flattered to be a member of this esteemed group.

After the bios from the Board members, Mr. Schmieg announced that there will be no public comments today. He then indicated that the first order of business will be the election of officers for the Board beginning with the Chair person. Once he presided over the election of the Chair person, he turned the meeting over to that person.

Once Mr. DeFoor was elected Chairperson of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board, he then presided over the election of the remaining officers. After proper motions, seconds and unanimous votes the following members were elected in offices.

- Vice Chair – Louise Hill
- Secretary – Marsha Farrow

There was a discussion of the Board members' staggered term limit. The Board members volunteered for the following terms.

- 3 years – Greg Kirk, Louise Hill and Jimmy DeFoor
- 2 years – Don Parks, Marsha Farrow and Bob Green
- 1 year – Fay Loggins, Amy O'Dell and Sandy Adams

The next item on the agenda is to schedule the Board future meetings. After the motion was properly seconded, it passed unanimously that the Board will meet on the **second Wednesday of each month at 1:00 p.m.**

Mr. Schmieg then reviewed the power point hand out which summarized his executive director's report and then discussed each item. He spoke about the five programs of the GVRA and provided a summary of the budget. In his report, Mr. Schmieg also summarized a transition update and provided a calendar of the upcoming meetings of the SRC (August 2), DD Council August 2, GATES (August 10) NFB of Georgia (August 13) and the SILC Board (August 14).

He thanked Commissioner Reese and Transition Chief Keith Horton who helped us significantly as well as their superb staff which helped us with this move.

Mr. Schmieg invited Commissioner Reese to come forward to explain what "Administratively Attached" really means. Commissioner Reese summarized how the process of moving the Rehabilitation Services began with a conversation with the Governor. After reviewing the current organizational structure of the DHS, he acknowledged that GVRA is not governed by DHS. The agency has its own rule making authority and the role of DHS will be that of support to the degree desired by the Executive Director, who reports directly to the Governor. He indicated his goal is to help in shifting the agency and programs of Rehabilitation first to DHS and then later to its own independent place. Commissioner Reese, then acknowledge Keith Horton, Director of Child Support Recovery, who he tapped to serve as the leader of the transition efforts. They both received a round of applause. He sees this opportunity as one to help make GVRA one of the best programs in the United States of America, and he offered to continue to support the agency in any way he could.

Commissioner Reese acknowledged his appreciation to Greg Schmieg and Jimmy DeFoor in their respective roles and expressed his excitement that they have been chosen to help lead this new organization. After Commissioner Reese completed his comments, Mr. Schmieg then introduced the directors of the five programs:

Raj Gandy, Director of the Business Enterprise Program
Sharon Baker, Director of the Disability Adjudication Services
Jim Hughes, Director Georgia
Bill Bulloch, Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute
Twyla Crump, Director or Field Services
Ava Searce Director of VR Support Services

Mr. Schmieg continued to explain that the VR is involved in five federal grants. One of the grants requires that there be VR Plan and the other a Statewide Plan for Independent Living. The advisory groups are the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). Both of these Councils serve to represent consumers on the employment side as well as the independent side. Mr. Schmieg then encourages the Board to bond with the SRC and SILC in creating a strong collaborative working relationship.

In addition, Mr. Schmieg pointed out that GVRA contracts with multiple providers and vendors to provide services statewide. These providers are very important whether they are private, cooperatives or advocacy groups. They really help to serve Georgians with disabilities. One of my goals is to create a culture in this agency of inclusiveness.

Mr. Schmieg proceeded to give an update on the transition. The good news is the phones are working, the computers are working and we are over here in 2 Peachtree Street thanks to Commissioner's Reese's team.

In addition, the five federal grants required an executed transfer agreements and they were executed by Commissioner Reese, Dept of Labor, and Deputy Commissioner for the US Dept of Education.

Because of the brief time that was available to make this transition, there were certain things that just could not be done. In particular, Information Technology supports. DHS worked on our behalf to secure a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Dept of Labor for the first year. All of our IT support and infrastructure will be provided by the Dept of Labor.

Another major part of this transition is there are 17 co-located properties (VR offices and Career Centers); therefore, in the MOU, we have a sublease agreement where we are paying rent to the Dept of Labor. On the co-located properties, there is a 60-day out clause. We have begun to look for our own space. DHS is trying to help us with that. As soon as we find alternate space suitable for VR services, we will give our 60-day notice and move out of the career center spaces into our own locations.

There is no such out clause on the IT support, we have to do it for a year.

Mr. Schmiege then went on to the FY'13 and FY'14 budget. The budget process really starts at the end of this month. The first thing is called the amendment cycle for the FY'13 budget. We will have to make a presentation to the legislators if our current FY'13 budget has some shortfalls. This may be the best year ever to make the case for tracking more money because we are a brand new agency. Mr. Schmiege mentioned that Lynn Vellinga, DHS Chief Financial Officer has been very helpful. We do not have a budget officer for our agency. Mr. Schmiege stated that he will keep the Board informed and appreciate any guidance, support and advice. The law reads that the Board presents the budget.

We are in the process of trying to recruit for a Chief Financial Officer for the new agency, and we are working with Rosa Waymon, DHS Human Resources Director. Commissioner Reese advised Mr. Schmiege that we need a legislative liaison. When thinking about money, it does make sense having someone present with the legislators making our case by telling our story so that we can ask for money needed to provide services for Georgians.

In the law, the Board really approves the positions; therefore, he will like to discuss this with the Board. Do you want to limit the amount of positions or delegate that authority down?

Concerning the first 100 days of the strategic plan, Mr. Schmiege wants our agency to be aggressive in how we put in place new programs to show we serve and we mean business. So he asked the program directors assistance in pulling together a 100 day plan for the agency. This can be as simple as getting our own website up and running. But the other aspects of the plan may be much more strategic in nature. He will ask our providers, SILC, SRC and community partners for their input on the future direction this agency. He believes that the driving philosophy of this agency should always be about those we serve. It should be about every individual we serve. The agency's measure of success should be the outcomes of those we serve. If those we serve are not successful in reaching their goals, it is a direct reflection

that the agency is not successful. Mr. Schmieg's intention is that we should be very aggressive about individualized services to individuals. No two people are exactly alike and when we lump each other together, we miss the beauty of each other. So he is asking publically for them to join us in the process of developing a strategic plan for the direction of this agency. Where do we collectively want to see this agency a year from now, three years from now, five years from now? As Commissioner Reese so aptly put, we want to be the best state in the union when it comes to services for persons with disabilities. Mr. Schmieg welcomes everyone to the table and asks for their help in designing the direction of this agency. He wants everyone to work with us to find common ground on how we move this agency forward.

Mr. Schmieg brought to the Board's attention some items on the calendar and invited every member to attend. He has scheduled the following meetings.

- The State Rehab Counsel on August 2
- The DD Council on August 2
- GATES providers in Macon on August 10
- The National Federation for the Blind (NFB) in Decatur August 13
- Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Board on August 14

This is an opportunity to meet with our partners and say how do you think we can do services better for persons with disabilities. How would you like to see us move the agency forward? What would you like to see us accomplish in a year.

Mr. Schmieg mentioned the Georgia Rehabilitation Association (GRA), professional association, is holding its annual conference September 5-7 in Savannah, GA. He thinks we have one of the best state chapters in the nation. GRA has invited the Board to hold a town hall. He thinks it is a wonderful opportunity if the Board could attend.

Greg then turned the meeting over to Jimmy DeFoor.

The next item on the agenda is the adoption of the By-Laws. Mr. DeFoor asked for a motion to adopt the By-Laws. Mr. Schmieg then added that the By-Laws are a blending of Dept of Human Services By-Laws and the Dept of Community Health thanks to Commissioner Reese.

After a proper motion, second and unanimous vote, the By-Laws were adopted the way they stand.

The last agenda item is the confirmation of Greg Schmieg for the GVRA Executive Director. Every Board member voiced support of Mr. Schmieg's nomination as Executive Director and the motion was seconded followed by a unanimous vote. Congratulation! Greg Schmieg is the Executive Director of GVRA.

Jimmy DeFoor asked if anyone had comments or questions. There being none, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:30 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Board will be on Wednesday, August 8, 2012, at 2 Peachtree Street, NW, 29th Floor, Room 250, Atlanta, GA 30303.



Marsha Farrow
Marsha Farrow, Secretary

APPROVED:
Jimmy DeFoor
Jimmy DeFoor, Chair