

Blind Services Foundation of Florida Inc.

Annual Report 2021-2022

During this year, the Blind Services Foundation was involved with three projects. First, we continued to work on the vocational educational tool which we devoted two years of funding to develop. We allocated some additional dollars to accomplish a number of outcomes that we felt were still required. First, Karen Wolffe worked with the Division of Blind Services to accomplish the transfer of the various elements of the project from Ms. Wolffe's account to one owned and operated by the Division of Blind Services. Second, Ms. Wolffe worked with the two individuals from the Division of Blind Services who were responsible for the maintenance of the tool to make sure they knew how to score the tool and how to perform other maintenance tasks. Third, there remains some work to be completed with regard to the manual and it emerged by the end of the legislative session that we could move forward with copyright efforts. So, Ms. Wolffe will be working on this element as well. Finally, at least two additional training sessions for two distinct groups will be completed in the Fall of 2022. Training for DBS staff & training for those doing vocational evaluations are being planned.

The second project we continued to support was the Rate Study which was our primary project for last year. We received what was expected to be a final report from Chip Kenney on behalf of San Diego State University. However, he indicated that a substantial number of agencies had not data that would allow the inclusion of their information in the final report. Chip Kenney and Amy Grissom from Florida Agencies Serving the Blind (FASB) agreed to work together to see if more data could be collected. As soon as this element is finalized, we will have completed our involvement with the rate study.

Our project for this year involved developing and implementing a program to make training available in the use of technology for older people who are blind. For a variety of reasons, the project is just at the beginning of its implementation. At the end of this fiscal year, the Board decided that it was likely they would add funds to this project and add children to the mix. An initial proposal has been developed that includes both groups and it is expected that the whole project will begin October 1, 2022.

This project has been difficult to envision. As it currently is envisioned, online training, in person training that may be videoed so it can be placed online, and the provision of some relatively low-cost equipment are all included. The Chair of the Blind Services Foundation, the Executive Director of FASB and a designated representative from the Division of Blind Services will meet at least once a month to act as the management component of this project. We expect deliverables to be available by May 1, 2023 and believe we can serve at least sixty individual clients by that time.

We have continued to work on the development of a poster which is now in the process of being printed. It is expected that it will be distributed to DBS offices and efforts will be made to place them in licensing offices and elsewhere. We have scheduled an opportunity to evaluate how well the posters work by looking at whether our income increases. We also want to contact motorcycle clubs and dealers. We have also discussed other methods we can use to publicize our work.

We currently keep the Florida Rehabilitation Council for the Blind informed of our activities and, through them, most districts of the Division of Blind Services know what we are doing. We also provide information to the three main consumer organizations in the state: the Blind Veterans Association, the National Federation of the Blind of Florida, and the Florida Council of the Blind. During this year, Karen Wolffe presented to the Florida Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (FAERBVI) on our vocational education tool and Paul Edwards, Chair of the Foundation and Robert Doyle, Director of the Division of Blind Services, presented in December to the conference of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Both these presentations were well received and helped publicize the work of the foundation in supporting the mission of the Division.

We have actually prepared an initial outline that can be used to solicit proposals to the Foundation. That procedure has actually been approved by the Board but has not yet been implemented. This is because we have, so far, either been continuing projects or have had projects in mind that have been proposed either at Board meetings or from elsewhere. Our Board meets at least five times a year. In addition, our Budget Committee adopts a budget which is presented to the Board for its approval. The document for soliciting proposals may be tried out this year for some small projects to see how well it works.

Internal controls are very stringent. We meet five times a year and provide a complete treasurer's report at each meeting. Every expenditure is discussed prior to its being approved and the Board would have to approve any deviation from the budget before it could happen. We have not had to modify our budget and have significantly underspent our items that involve internal operation of the Foundation. We have spent no money for travel and most of our regular expenditures relate to maintaining Foundation status with the state and paying for our new and improved web site.

Over the next three years it is our expectation that we will continue to function in a relatively similar way that we operate now. We now have our posters and brochures; we have begun to develop a plan to publicize what we are doing; we have developed an approach for soliciting proposals which we expect to trial this year. We will recruit at least one new member to replace a member of the Board who has resigned. We will continue to look for innovative projects that enhance the effectiveness of the Division of Blind Services.

A review of our last five major initiatives demonstrates how valuable our efforts are. Currently we are providing funds to provide technological training and equipment to two categorically

underserved populations: older people who are blind and children not old enough to be served by the Vocational Rehabilitation element of DBS. Our previous project created a clear and measurable study to assure that the rates that were being paid by the Division of Blind Services to local service providers were fair and appropriate. Before that, we worked to develop and test a Vocational Evaluation Tool that is the only current, blindness specific evaluation system that is available in the world. I could go further back but I think it is clear that the Foundation has utilized its major projects to make a substantive difference in the lives of people who are blind in Florida and beyond.

Those of us who serve on the Blind Services Foundation Board continue to appreciate the opportunity to do what we can to make the lives of people who are blind or have low vision in Florida better. We believe that we have been good stewards of the funds under our care and have used the money we have raised to underwrite programs which have significantly affected the success of the Division of Blind Services, local lighthouses, and the people with vision loss in our state. At the heart of what we do is a desire to find projects that can make a real difference to the success of the Division and of the people who are blind that the Division serves. We appreciate the honor it is to be able to make a difference!

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Edwards, Chair

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