

Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board
April 29, 2009 Meeting Minutes

Approved

A meeting of the Suffolk County Disabilities Advisory Board was held on April 29, 2009 in the Conference Room of Building 158, North County Complex, Hauppauge at 2:10 pm, Chairwoman Beverly Cody presided.

PRESENT:

GROUP A

Bruce G. Blower	Representing County Executive Steve Levy
Jack Caffey	Representing Legislature Presiding Officer William Lindsay
John Murray	S.C. Department of Public Works/Transportation Division
Linda O'Donohoe	S.C. Department of Social Services
Paulette Bartunek	S.C. Human Rights Division
Alice Young	S.C. Department of Labor
Barbara Falkman	S.C. Department of Health Services/Div. of Services with Special Needs

GROUP B

Beverly Cody	Member, Secretary & Acting Chair
Debbie Epple	Member, S.C. Department of Civil Service/Public Info.

GROUP C

Teresa Strum	Member, Western Suffolk BOCES
--------------	-------------------------------

GROUP D

Mitchell Shapiro	Member
Jim Sorrentino	Member
Frank Krotshinsky, Esq.	Member

GUEST SPEAKER: Kevin Darcy, SCDPW Transportation

GUESTS: John Mikochik from Sagamore Children's Center and his PCA Karen.

STAFF: Heidi Zeitler, Clerk Typist, Suffolk County Office of Handicapped Services

EXCUSED: Leg. Kate Browning, Judy Record, Joseph Sanseverino, Valerie Lewis, Terry Maccarrone, Tedd Goddek, Kleo King, Roy Probeyahn, Glenn Campbell, Ingo Gloeckner

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MARCH 25, 2009: Beverly asked if there were any changes to be made to the minutes as distributed. Jim said he thought Bruce had reported that the Eastern Wheelchair Athletics Foundation team was going to receive \$400.00 from Easter Seals and the minutes state they received \$4,000. Bruce said they actually ended up receiving \$25,000 but the \$4,000 reported earlier was accurate as of the last SCADAB meeting. Jack motioned to accept the minutes and Jim seconded the motion. All were in favor and the minutes were unanimously approved.

CORRESPONDENCE: Bruce spoke to Mr. Ed Kaplan who is a travel trainer from the Commission on the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), and he said that orange or yellow background with black lettering is the way to go for the bus stop signs with Braille marking and raised lettering. He also pointed out that the border edging on the signs should be fixed so they aren't sharp. Mitch mentioned his friend who has the same disability as him said that the new kiosks they installed at Penn Station have sharp corners.

Kevin Darcy, SCDPW Transportation came here today to discuss the idea of requiring SCAT riders to use their seat belts. It's mainly a safety issue and a cost effective issue and there have been some incidents on bus as well. A survey was done and approximately 75% of the riders who ride SCAT buses use seat belts. Kevin said they might need to check with other municipalities to see what kind of policies they have in place and if it works well for them. Kevin said they also reached out to the FTA for guidance on this issue and if a policy is established it would need to be the same for everyone on the bus. Kevin said there are no seat belts on transit buses but there are seat belts on the paratransit buses. Bruce explained that on the SCAT bus, wheelchairs are strapped down with 4 straps that are hooked into braces on the floor and the person is fastened with a seatbelt. Bruce said that he rode on the METRO in Washington, DC which had no tie downs and the person in the wheelchair just holds onto the pole. The line buses have a fold up seat and the person in the wheelchair backs in and the wheelchair is tied down. Mitch asked what the law is for school buses. Teresa said seat belts are required and they also have tie downs. Mitch is surprised that wearing a seat belt on the SCAT bus and line buses aren't required by law already. Bruce said if you have a note from your physician stating you can't wear a seat belt because of medical condition or disability, you're exempt from using it. Teresa said her only concern of requiring SCAT passengers to use seat belts and not requiring it on other buses would give the appearance of discrimination. Beverly feels it should be offered as an option to wear a seat belt. Bruce said if seat belts were to be required on SCAT buses and the person refuses to wear it, we can't deny them the trip. John said if you require seat belts on buses then it would have to be required on rails also. Jack doesn't feel a seat belt should be required under law because of all the different scenarios we talked about. It was suggested by the board to educate and encourage the use seat belts but not make it a law requiring it. The SCAT driver could announce for passengers to use the seat belts for their own safety. The board recommended making it optional for their use. Jack made a motion and Mitch seconded that motion.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT: Beverly mentioned last night on TV, Frontline had a program about how they are releasing severely mentally ill people from prison. The prisons are taking the place of the state mental hospitals. Beverly said it was touching and upsetting to watch because these people are released with no place to go, maybe 2 weeks worth of medicine. Some of these prisoners have been in and out of prison over 100 times. It's not only a tragedy for these ex-cons but also puts the public in danger. Beverly said when she worked at VESID she was the liaison for probation and parole and they had people turn up at the office who were just released from jail with no place to live and no jobs. Alice added they are the fastest growing target population that they have seen. Bruce said it's an ongoing problem, the State Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities under a state law that was enacted last year, has been given the oversight responsibility of the mental health treatment in the state penitentiary system. They will start meeting with the state penitentiary system within the next 2 years and checking to see what type of mental health services are available to the prisoners. Bruce said as one of the Commissioner's on the State Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, this project was put in the budget and they were given the authorization to hire 17 people and now the project has been cut in half. Beverly asked Jack if this concern comes up in the Legislature. Jack said yes sometimes, there are sub-committees of categories and you as a chairperson are always invited to go and enlighten the legislature on these topics because they are not aware of it unless they are directly involved some way. Jack said he always conveys the issues we discuss here, to the Presiding Officer so he is aware of the issues. Beverly asked if she were able to get a copy of the Frontline show would the legislature be interested in seeing it. Jack said yes, get a copy of the show and we can then make eighteen copies and give one to each legislator. Bruce said another issue which he has talked to the sheriff about is that there is still a stigma attached to people admitting they have a mental disability and when they are arrested they don't mention it. The jail does try their best to screen people but most people don't want it known.

Jack said the Suffolk County Sheriff's department has a group of people who are on duty 24 hours a day who are in charge of children/adults that may have wander from their homes. There is a bracelet that you can buy for \$300.00 and the battery works for 4-5 days before it needs to be replaced. The bracelet gives off indications of where the person may be. The legislature wasn't aware of this information until the Sheriff's Dept. came to testify before the legislature, no one knew about it. There are a number of states that are also doing it but NYC and Nassau County don't have it. Suffolk County has been involved with this project about 5 years. Jack said he would give the information to Heidi so she can send this information to all SCDAB members.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Architectural Barriers – Tedd Godek was excused.

Community Partnership – Bruce reported that they are trying to make it possible for JEEP applicants to register on their web-site.

Education - Teresa reported that every 5 years since 1998 all BOCES in NYS had to submit a 5 year regional state plan. It's so the state can take a look at how each of the school districts are putting in place plans to service their special needs students in the least restrictive environment possible. This all came about because the Long Island Regions were showing a high percentage of students in segregated settings. Districts have been addressing this issue over the years by reviewing plans to create programs to bring students back into district programming or preventing referrals out of district programming. In doing so School Districts also have to make sure they have adequate space and adequate facilities within their building. In the region of Western Suffolk we began with about 12% of the special education population in a segregated setting and most were in a BOCES, but that also included other private institutions. At the end of the first 5 years and in the initial next 5 year program it had been reduced to 6.5% which was a great reduction. The BOCES themselves work with the districts to help them create programs to facilitate bringing students back as well as working with them to ensure they have models put in place for pre-referral intervention. For the next 5 year plan the regional goal which just ended in December 2008 was 4.2%. Our region exceeded that benchmark and right now we are at an average of 3.8% with the special education population being serviced in segregated settings. It was a big jump because the region exceeded the benchmark and we are currently at the benchmark that was set for 2014. As a region one of the means to meet this goal was to bring non-disabled students into programs that were formally segregated programs, one such population addresses psychiatrically impaired student. Many of the existing programs used to be completely segregated, servicing only special need students classified by CSE. They are now serving more students who are 504 or not classified in any way but in need of special services, so their needs can be met outside of the district programming at least for part of the day.

Housing - Vacant.

Legislation – Frank had nothing new to report.

Transportation - Cliff was absent but sent an e-mail requesting a response from his comment below:

I wonder how a medical certification would work. Taking into consideration that the basis for eligibility for Paratransit service is you must have a mobility impairment which prevents you from using a fix route. How will the Doctor know which route you are going to use and what stop you are getting on and off at.

SCDAB

April 29, 2009

Page 4

Medical certifications along with what Bruce refers to as a physical certification only work in areas which all stops are accessible. Are all bus stops in Suffolk County Accessible? I am interested in hearing the task force's response.

Regards-

*Clifford Hymowitz
Mobility & Disability Specialist
Town of Brookhaven*

Employment – Alice reported that May is considered Mental Health Wellness month so they are putting together some programs they will be offering through the One-Stop. They are also trying to get information more readily to their staff by something they call 30 second training. Blurbs, links and resources from the One-Stop were put on all staff computers so the information is accessible more quickly. Alice met with Liz Pearsall and they will be redoing their policy & procedures to make sure they comply with the regulations for customers. They will also be adding more disability access symbols in some locations. Alice mentioned she just got the Dib-Tack Disability Law Handbook for 2009 which covers a lot of information in government agencies, transportation and rehabilitation. Bruce mentioned you can get a lot of good information on a web-site called DisabilityInfo.gov

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS:

Suffolk County Office of Handicapped Services - Bruce announced that John Murray will be retiring after 31 ½ years working for the county and then Bruce announced his own retirement of about 30 years for the same day. Bruce said he was one of the original people appointed to sit on this board back in 1976 when it was called the Handicapped Advisory Board. Bruce then went on to become chairman and then because Bruce was chairman he was asked to write the proposal that created his office. The proposal to create the office was written for Tony Parga who was a disabled attorney who worked in the County Executive's Office. Tony had an October start date so that the budget could be put together. January 1st, 1980 was also the day of the International Year of Disabled Persons called by the United Nations. A week before Tony's October start date, Tony called Bruce with some bad news, he said he was leaving the county to work as a clerk, to a Supreme Court Judge. Bruce then called the County Executive to let him know and in turn the County Executive offered Bruce the position as Director of Handicapped Services.

Bruce then announced to everyone that Frank Krotschinsky will be replacing him as Director of OHS. Frank has a long background on disability and he is still on the board at SILO and was also the chairman for several years.

Jack wanted to be the first to tell Bruce that Suffolk County has been blessed to have had him as Director for so many years and wish you the best.

Bruce said thank you and that he and his family will be staying here on the Island. Bruce will still be working in the field of disability as a Commissioner on the state level and also sits on the Verizon Consumer Advisory Board on the national level. Bruce said he will miss everyone and also thanked John Murray for all his service.

Frank said he had a long time being familiar with disability issues but hopes Bruce will be available to him with all his wisdom.

Suffolk County Parks - Terry was excused.

S. C. Department of Social Services - Linda had nothing new to report.

S. C. Office of Public Information – Debbie reminded everyone that the *Boomers and Seniors Products and Services Fair* will be held tomorrow, April 30th from 3 to 6pm at the Middle Country Library in Centereach. She let everyone know the next *We Work for You Community Forum* sponsored by The County Executive's Office will be held May 13 at the Robert Moses Middle School in Babylon. Information and registration can be found on county web page. She reported that the Public Information Office will issue a bulletin on the Sheriff's "Project Lifesaver" Program. She also reminded everyone to please send their information to her regarding the 2008 SCDAB Annual Report.

VESID – Ingo was excused.

Old Business – Bruce mentioned there is an update about the Bavarian Inn included in the hand-outs.

New Business – Bruce reminded everyone about the Homeless Veterans Stand Down which will be held on May 1, 2009 at Suffolk Community College, Brentwood Campus from (10-2). All the federal agencies will be there including Social Security, Veteran's Administration and most of the county agencies that deal with Human Services.

Mitch handed out some brochures about his new program called "Help America Hear Program". They give out hearing aides to people who fall through the cracks. They need to meet certain criteria, including earning less than \$25,000 a year, have no health insurance and there is a \$75.00 application fee. They are fitted with two hearing aides at no cost to them and this particular provider that they choose in this program is not allowed to make any money off the person for at least one year. They have already fitted over 20 people and they have gotten 14 inquiries over the last 3 weeks. For more information you can call (631) 366-3461 or you can visit mitschsdream.org.

Mitch was invited to speak at the Nassau County Library Outreach on Monday. They had a presenter there talking about people 50 plus returning back into the job market. It was a very good presentation on how people can use the library as a resource for resume building. While Mitch was there he also spoke about another program the their foundation does, Mitch said if you go into a Suffolk County Library ask them if they have any assistive technology, such as computer software program called Zoom text or CCTV and if they don't, have them contact Mitch because they have helped up to 16 libraries with this assistive technology. Mitch's goal is to have all libraries on Long Island have this equipment available for visually challenged people and once they are done with L.I. they will go to the 5 boroughs and beyond.

Bruce wanted to mention he recently spoke to Judy Record who had been in the hospital for 7 weeks and she was just getting out and she hopes to be able to rejoin the board and become active again.

S.C. Department of Health/Division of Children with Special Health Care Needs – Barbara had nothing new to report.

SCDAB

April 29, 2009

Page 6

S.C. Department of Public Works/Transportation Division – John said there are 2 County Legislators, one from the North fork and one from the South fork that want to start Sunday bus service as well as expand weekday hours. Although it might not happen now, considering the circumstances it looks good for the future. SCAT does shadow the transit service so if that does happen SCAT would also have Sunday service.

Bruce said the Transportation Task Force will meet soon again once all the information is gathered from the outside.

Glenn/SILO - Glenn was excused.

S.C. Human Rights Commission - Paulette announced that Suffolk County Human Rights Commission will be having their 2009 Awards Dinner on May 14th. Paulette said she would e-mail Heidi the information so she can forward it to everyone.

S.C. Community Development - Joseph was excused.

S.C. Library System - Valerie was excused.

ADJOURNMENT: Jack made a motion to adjourn and Mitch seconded the motion. All were in favor to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m. The next meeting will be held Wednesday, May 27, 2009 at 2:00pm in the conference room, Building 158, Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge.

Respectfully submitted,
Heidi Zeitler