

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT) ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
December 5, 2007

Members Attending

Scott Higdon, Chair
John Eisenburg, Vice Chair
Ben Garrett
Linda Harris

Conference Phone Attendance:

Celestine Walker, Secretary
Patricia Beattie
Doug Owens

Absent:

Tom Dowling
Peggy Fields
Elizabeth Flaherty
Joe Foresta
Doug James
Senator Yvonne Miller
Ricky Palmateer
Sam Simon
Brenda Wickard

Guests:

James Rothrock, Commissioner, DRS
James Jefferson, Goodwill Virginia Beach
David Nelson, Goodwill Central Virginia

Staff:

Dr. Joseph Ashley
Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS)
Ken Knorr
Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS)
Bob Krollman, VATS
Jane Lively, VATS
Elin Glass, VATS
Dave Netherton, VATS S-E
Joann Ervin, VATS S-E

Welcome and Introductions:

Scott Higdon, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00am. He welcomed members and guests to the meeting and invited Dr. Joseph Ashley, Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), to make opening comments.

Dr. Ashley welcomed members and guests and expressed his appreciation for the work of the Council. He also acknowledged the excellent effort of Ken Knorr and Jane Lively, VATS staff, in building the assistive technology (AT) recycling programs. He also recognized Bob Krollman for his work in AT training that is integrating VATS and the DRS Field program.

Housekeeping:

Elin Glass, VATS, reminded Council members of the importance of responding promptly about their attendance at meetings so staff can arrange meals and set up phone lines for conference calls. Travel reimbursement for members may be completed by signing a DRS travel voucher and submitting receipts for lodging, meals and transportation.

Approval of 9-19-07 Council Meeting Minutes:

Minutes of the September 19, 2007, Assistive Technology Advisory Council Meeting were approved as written.

Public Comments:

There were no public comments.

VATS Update

VATS central office has assumed the responsibility of the Statewide Information and Referral Program. Elin Glass is coordinating the program under the direction of Bob Krollman. VATS has received one-half of the funding from Rehabilitation Service Administration, since the federal government is operating on a continuing resolution. Mr. Knorr is working to raise visibility of assistive technology and is meeting with various groups encouraging them to meet with their legislators to gain support of the budget amendment to support AT recycling programs. The amendment is being sponsored by a legislator from the Roanoke area.

Mr. Knorr recently attended a Federal meeting with John Eisenberg, Department of Education, on instructional materials in alternative formats. The Department of Education has contracted with George Mason University, one of VATS Regional Sites, to produce alternate formats as needed. A system is now in place to scan 2500 pages per hour for alternate format for students.

The retirement of 2 VATS staff opens the opportunity to look at the structure of VATS and to consider new ways to organize that will maximize resources and impact. Therefore, Jim Rothrock, DRS Commissioner, called a VATS Strategic Planning Meeting inviting stakeholders representing disability services agencies, consumers, and VATS staff. The meeting was held on November 15, 2007. A report of the meeting has been submitted to Commissioner Rothrock for his consideration. Scott Higdon, Chair, Assistive Technology Advisory Council, attended the meeting.

One of the outcomes of the VATS Strategic Planning Meeting was a statement from Clayton Bowen, Department of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH), that it is Virginia's assistive technology program and all disability services agencies could share information and data. For example, DDHH could partner with VATS to share data for VATS Federal Report to provide statistics.

Mr. Krollman is working on the development of a statewide training for employers that focuses on AT in the workplace and how it relates to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). This is part of a new 5-year initiative from the Pennsylvania ADA Resource Center using the structure of the Mid Atlantic Consortium. Five people in the State went through their training. We are to train 35 Virginia employers each year. VATS hopes to have the training program operational within 6 months.

Dr. Ashley added that the Medicaid Infrastructure grant bought two displays and AT kits. Mr. Krollman stated that the kits provide things employers can put their hands on and learn how accommodate a person with a disability for a particular job.

John Eisenburg, Department of Education, stated that he would like to see what DRS has in their kits compared to the kits the Department of Education has. He would like to collaborate and work together. Dr. Ashley stated that DRS would be glad to show what assistive technology they have and how it works. Mr. Eisenburg stated there are 175,000 students with disabilities in the schools and they will need to transition to employment. We need to prepare the students

Accommodating individuals who are deaf was discussed. Using sign language interpreters at the community college can cost \$25,000 a month. Cost to employers can be like funding an additional position. Bob Krollman suggested Ms Harris meet with Mary Nunnally, DRS. Mr. Krollman offered to arrange a meeting to discuss interpreting service needs. Jane Lively suggested talking with Tom Dowling, Council member, about his accommodations at the United States Securities Exchange Commission. Mr. Dowling represents the Virginia Association for the Deaf and he may be able to get their input on this issue. Scott Higdon stated he has communications with Federal entities and will give names to Ms. Harris so they can talk to communication developers.

Ms. Lively reported there are currently 11 assistive technology recycling programs operating in the State. The Fairfax site held their open house on December 1, 2007. Ms. Lively is also working with a group in Winchester who want to develop a program. With guidance from Robin Ramsey, Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (FREE), they are laying out the specific tasks to accomplish and assigning responsibilities. Both Fairfax and Winchester have decided to become chapters of FREE. The disAbility Resource Center is developing programs in Culpeper and Orange County. Goodwill of Central Virginia has opened new programs in Petersburg and Virginia Beach. FREE is also working with a Giles County hospital to start a program there.

Ms. Lively will send council members contact information for the operating programs.

Mr. Krrollman has been asked to conduct a meeting and site visit by Dr. Richard Luck, Department of Rehabilitative Services for Henry Baskerville, Director, Safaris Unlimited, LLC and Cavalier Sporting Clays. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss how to develop an accessible recreational target shotgun facility, to tour the existing facility and, using the principles of Universal Design, to make recommendations to improve access of both the physical facility and any programs to be developed.

David Netherton, Southeast VATS Regional Site (VATS SE) stated ODU is training clients to use assistive technology. The veterans at Hampton Veterans Hospital are interested in similar training. VATS SE will have a conference "Your Power - Your Choice" at ODU on March 14, 2008. They are planning "Say Yes to College" in which students spend the night at ODU and are exposed to AT. An AT demo lab is being shared by Williamsburg, Portsmouth, and surrounding areas.

Report on Future of VATS

Jim Rothrock joined the meeting by telephone to let Council know about the status of the recommendations from the VATS Strategic Planning Meeting. Stakeholders offered good ideas on how to structure VATS. Stakeholders looked at VATS relationships with the three regional sites at George Mason University, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Tech; Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center; the DRS Field Program and the entire network of partners. Commissioner Rothrock stated he would look at the report from the meeting and work with Mr. Knorr and Dr. Ashley to discuss options. They will look at the structure, considering State entities and private entities, types of people to provide leadership and how to address reporting requirements. They will look at what all disability agencies are doing in the area of assistive technology and add their data to more fully represent what is going on in the State.

Commissioner Rothrock stated that he is ready to listen to concerns or any ideas from any of the Council members.

Commissioner Rothrock commented on the State Leadership Meeting in which all DRS councils share information, priorities, and plans. Scott Higdon and John Eisenberg represented the VATS Council. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources provided an overview of the Governor's office.

Scott Higdon asked Commissioner Rothrock when staff replacements will be announced. The Commissioner responded with a timeline of within six months. He would like to have new staff overlap with current staff so they can provide a basic overview of VATS.

Tour of Assistive Technology Recycling Program for Virginia Beach

Jim Jefferson, Goodwill of Virginia Beach, and David Nelson, Goodwill of Central Virginia, provided a tour of the recycling facility at Goodwill of Virginia Beach. The facility is new and was started with guidance from Goodwill of Central Virginia.

Member Activities

Ben Garrett, Department on Aging, stated he was amazed with the progress of the Council. He stated that the Department of Aging has a new Commissioner, Linda Noble. He commented on possible changes that may be needed under the direction of the new Commissioner. Mr. Garrett is also working towards improving the 211 phone service. The Department of Aging is planning a display at the General Assembly, January 14-18, 2008. He invited VATS to add AT devices to the display.

John Eisenburg, Department of Education, reported that the Department is developing a document that provides guidance in considering AT during IEP meetings. This will replace the old VATS IEP booklet. Mr. Eisenburg will bring a draft copy of the new IEP book to the next VATS Advisory Council Meeting.

The Technology Conference, held in Richmond, included vendors and approximately 300 attendees. They provided a speaker to discuss AT in the classroom.

The Virginia Society for Technology and Education Conference is coming up and they will have an AT booth with low to high tech AT. There will be a session during which AT is the focus. There will be two State conferences on reading and AT. The department is emphasizing advanced software and literacy technology. Mr. Eisenburg will send VATS a flyer on these events.

The Education Department is working with George Mason University (GMU) to print texts in alternate formats. The IEP teams will determine the alternate form needed. This program at GMU should be running smoothly by spring.

Linda Harris, representing the New Well Fund, announced the new name, replacing the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority. New Well Fund brochures are being developed. There is still no funding for the Consumer Service Fund which was the fund of last resort. They plan to take this issue before the Governor's Disability Commission. They are increasing loans, including amounts for direct loans to \$10,000 with no bank process required.

New Business:

Scott Higdon informed member that there will be a VATS display booth at the upcoming General Assembly session. Mr. Higdon plans to attend on January 21 and invited other council members to come as well.

Mr. Higdon emphasized that members call-in to participate in meetings if they are not able to attend in person. He would like for members to not just give a report at the meetings, but bring ideas to make the Council better and think about how we can change things.

Scott Higdon stated that By-Laws will be discussed at the next meeting.

Next Meeting Date:

Mr. Higdon asked Ms. Lively to poll members for a meeting date in late January – early February so that the Council meets again before Ms. Lively and Mr. Knorr retire. The next meeting will be held in Richmond.