Minutes

Oklahoma Council of the Blind Board Meeting

February 22 2025

 President Boykin called the meeting to order at 9:05am.

 Those present were Elaine Boykin, Vicky Golightly, Dana Young, Pam Holloway, Frances Poindexter, Marilyn Sanders, Jeanne Meyer, Sandy Evans, and Magan Rowan. A quorum was established with the entire Board present. Guests were Jean Jones, Joseph Bundy, Julie Brantley, Debbie Sanders, Jay Doudna, Jesse Martinez, and Rae FitsPatrick.

 The President welcomed everyone to the meeting.

 Everyone observed a moment of silence in memory of those who passed away after the November, 2024, ,Board meeting.

 President’s Report

\* The American Council of the Blind (ACB) Conference and Convention will be held in Dallas on July 5-11. Earl Kessler will provide transportation to and from Dallas if at least six people go in his van. The price is $125. Convention registration opens May 15.

\* OCB has a table reserved for the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) People with Disabilities Awareness Day on March 11.

 The Treasurer’s report was filed as distributed on the OCB list.

 The minutes of the previous meeting were filed as distributed on the OCB List.

 There is still $2,800 in the Judy Pool Hansen Transportation Fund. The policy for this committee needs to be revised. Either Jay or Marilyn will send the original copy to Frances. This fund assists with sending members to the OCB convention.

 Jay reported our Freedom Voice telephone line is working well. Jay will handle all calls from this line with the exception of information on the Heartland Council of the Blind called by Vicky.

 Pam stated she received a call from a 40-year-old gentleman named Liam, who wishes to become active in OCB and HCB.

 Committee Reports

 Convention Committee. Co-Chair Frances reported the convention is at the Wyndham Garden Hotel on September 26-28. Room rates are $89 per night plus applicable sales taxes. Coni Sims from South Dakota, who is on the ACB Board will be our keynote speaker. The Next Generation Committee is providing our entertainment on Friday night, and HCB will host the Friday night meal and the hospitality room. Committee chairs have been appointed. The convention theme is “Seizing Possibilities with OCB”. The next Convention Committee meeting is March 31. Vicky will call a Speaker’s Committee meeting in the next few weeks.

 History Committee. Chair Jeanne said the committee continues to document information to add to OCB’s history.

 Constitution Committee. Chair Jeanne said this Board would be good to serve on this committee.

 Social Media and Public Affairs Committees. Chair Sandy Evans reported

\* Our state convention is already on the OCB Facebook page where an event is created and people can invite others to the convention.

\* Sandy has been posting information of interest on Facebook, and she invited everyone to email her any interesting information.

\* OCB was supposed to have a table at the Oklahoma School for the Blind Future Shock event, but the event did not happen due to the weather. This event, which is growing in size, will be rescheduled.

\* As mentioned earlier, March 11 is the DRS People with Disabilities Awareness Day. There are around 75 booths and at the end of the event, awards from DRS are presented. The School for the Blind and the School for the Deaf will both perform.

 Website Committee. Chair Vicky said the website is always a work in progress. Our Administrator is Debbie Sanders, who puts up seasonal pictures, other photos, and until the end of 2024 there was a great tribute to Past President Kay Love. We continue to update the Calendar of events, resources, fundraising information etc. Committee members are Chair Vicky Golightly, Administrator Debbie Sanders, Frances Poindexter, Debi Tate, and Marilyn Sanders. We try to meet once per month. Frances stated we need continuous updates from our four chapters.

 Fundraising Committee. Chair Joseph said the Terry Lynn chocolate candy fundraiser took place around Valentines Day, which raised $115. Plans are to do a restaurant fundraiser throughout the state. The committee is in the process of collecting recipes for a cookbook to be published around Christmas.

 Interstate Auction Committee. Chair Vicky said the interstate auction is March 29. OCB has already donated ten items to be auctioned off, with all profits going to OCB. HCB and TCB contributed items as well as donations from individuals. At least nine ACB affiliates are involved in the auction. Last year OCB raised close to $1,000.

 Vicky said Leslie Spoone from ACB asked if OCB wished to donate an item for ACB’s Annual Summer and Christmas Auctions. Pam moved with second by Vicky, that OCB donate a $50 Visa gift card to the ACB Summer Auction and the ACB Christmas Auction every year … $50 Visa gift card to each auction. The motion carried.

 Dana suggested because we are collecting recipes for the cookbook, maybe people could bring some of their baked goods to the state convention to be auctioned off. This would be something good to include in the newsletter.

 Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk. Joseph, our Fundraising Chair, will chair this committee with the assistance of Jessie Martinez. President Boykin explained the duties of the Chair/Coordinator to include signing up as Captain of the Oklahoma Tornadoes with ACB and creating a page for the ACB website, keeping track of our donations, motivating in-person convention attendees to walk at the ACB convention, etc. Vicky moved, with second by Dana, that the Board allocate money to purchase a $50 gift card drawn from the names of the people who donated to the Oklahoma Tornadoes at the Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk. The motion carried. We made over $1,000 last year, with 50% going to ACB and the rest to OCB.

 Monthly Monetary Support (MMS). OCB is making $422 every quarter through MMS.

 Membership Committee and Membership Outreach Committee. Frances reported OCB has 425 members. It is important to let Frances know about members who are deceased or drop out of OCB. There hasn’t been a lot of membership outreach, but there may be some people in Enid who may or may not form an OCB chapter.

 OSB Committee. Chair Jeanne said she will contact OSB to determine how many seniors will graduate in May. OCB gives each senior a $25 gift card and information about OCB.

 Jeanne stated this is the year for the OSB Alumni reunion on July 18-20. Graduates, friends and family are invited to attend. Frances said this activity might be a good opportunity for OCB to make itself known. Sandy suggested offering a door prize from OCB as an outreach opportunity. Jesse said he attends the alumni reunions and shares information about OCB. Magan Rowan will be presenting technical information at the reunion.

 Jesse is eager to help out at our convention and Vicky reminded him of the March 31 OCB Convention Committee meeting.

 The Blind Spot. Editor Debbie said the first “Blind Spot” was sent out electronically in December. She indicated it is time to submit articles for the April issue. The deadline for submissions is March 10. Frances sends out a little over 100 emails, and there needs to be more work on getting members’ emails. Marilyn will send Frances the emails she has for TCB. When chapters send in names of members, it would be good to include email information.

 Governmental Affairs Committee. Chair Jean stated:

\* There is not a lot of state legislation to review. There are several pieces of legislation dealing with voting. The bill Senator Jett introduced last year or the year before, has been introduced again. This bill requires a doctors’ statement before a ballot can be sent to the voter electronically if the person is blind. The bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee, and the deadline for passage is February 27. There are some other bills, one requiring that voters have a photo ID when you vote, which can be your state ID/license and passport, but if you do not have these identifications, it requires that Service Oklahoma, which issues drivers’ licenses, to develop a voter card. Currently you can show your regular voter ID which does not have a photo, but this bill will cancel that option. This bill is moving along. There is another bill requiring people to document a reason for wanting to vote absentee, which Jean thinks will only apply to people who do a one-time request for this application.

\* There is a service animal bill by Representative Stark (HB1178) making it a misdemeanor for anyone representing a dog as a service animal, including claiming a therapy dog is a service animal, which is not the case. This bill is assigned to the House Criminal Justice Committee and is scheduled to be on the agenda next week.

\* There are a couple of bills which enlarge the DRS Commission on Rehabilitation Services. One is SB770 and the other is HB87, both moving. The Commission currently has three members, and the bills would change the number to seven, with two appointed by the Senate and two by the House Speaker and three appointed by the Governor.

\* There is a bill on information accessibility. SB 676 terminates a bunch of commissions and committees that are supposedly unnecessary and nonfunctional, which includes an electronic accessible technology information committee. There is a bill to eliminate the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and to transfer its functions to the Department of Corrections, which has not moved at this time. There was a bill which has for the time been withdrawn that would have eliminated some related services for the education of children with disabilities.

\* At the national level, there have been many executive orders issued by President Trump which will affect the lives of people who are blind. One of the proposals is to eliminate the Department of Education. The DOE administers and funds vocational rehabilitation, special education, older blind, independent living services, the American Printing House for the Blind, etc. It also can affect section 504 of the Rehab Act to the extent that complaints are related to the educational system. Staff has already been reduced, with the intent to fire more.

\* There is an executive order by the President to fire all staff in federal agencies who are involved in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI and accessibility programs and staff. This could be federal employees providing employment of people with disabilities and dealing with reasonable accommodations. The general attitude at the top of the new administration and DOGE has not been kind to people with disabilities, such as questioning the competency of people with disabilities, and countless other examples. We should all take notice and be concerned.

\* There is an executive order that the regulatory process will be more controlled in agencies, such as the regulatory body controlling rehabilitation services as well as special education for kids with disabilities including those who are blind and/or hearing impaired.

\* There is also an executive order published in the Federal Register which asserts presidential control over independent agencies that Congress has created, with employees already being fired. So, the regulatory processes will be essentially taken over by the President. Those independent agencies include the Social Security Administration.

\* The budget process is moving in Congress. The House has put forward a budget resolution, and the Senate has put out two budget-related resolutions, all of them seeming to involve severe cuts to Medicaid, which affects health care for many people who are blind, who may be on SSI, and it also affects other types of medical assistance for people who are not on SSI. There is also an expressed plan to possibly look for cuts in Medicare. One of the Senate budget bills calls for raising the eligibility age for Medicare.

\* ACB is putting out good information, which is published on the OCB List Serv. Claire Stanley, ACB’s Governmental Affairs Director, provides a lot of information on the ACB Announce list, which Vicky also forwards to the OCB List.

 Jay said it is imperative we contact our senators and representatives to express our concerns about everything listed above. Jean has sent out a list of contact information for all Oklahoma representatives and senators via their web forms. You need to live in the district of the representative or senator you contact. Jean will put this information on the OCB list.

 Debbie said Missouri Council sends out sample letters, and they are also joining with other blindness organizations so there is a cohesive unit to convey our needs and concerns.

 Next Generation Committee. Chair Dana reported the committee met in January. They discussed what they plan for our state convention entertainment on Friday night. Plans are to offer an extensive variety of games and fun activities. They are seeking prizes for some of the games and need sighted volunteers to assist with the games. The Fiction and Fizz book club meetings are also happening monthly.

 Unfinished Business

OCB has a constitution, but a Bylaws document needs to be created. Bylaws Committee members are Debbie Sanders, Chair; Dana Young, Joseph Bundy, and Marilyn Sanders.

 Marilyn Sanders will chair the Nominating Committee.

 Chapter presidents and/or representatives updated everyone on their programs and activities.

 New Business

Marilyn moved, with second by Vicky, that OCB provide ten scholarships to the 2025 Conference and Convention of the Oklahoma Council of the Blind with preference to first-time attendees, and if scholarships are left, they will be first-come-first-serve for other members. The motion carried. Vicky will coordinate the scholarships, which basically pay for convention registration. People who have attended a convention before must be in good standing by paying dues to one of the chapters before they can be considered for a scholarship.

 Dana moved, with second by Jesse, that the Scholarship Committee name be named the Kay Love Scholarship Committee. Other people who did outstanding work for OCB, such as Perry Sanders, were named. Jesse said perhaps we need to think of others who have also done outstanding work. Marilyn moved to table the motion.

 President Boykin said she learned from SBVI staff member Debi Trout that there is a deaf-blind person who would benefit from going to Jeri’s House for training. There are no Older Blind funds through SBVI to send this individual to a training center. The question is are there things OCB can do to assist this person with transportation or other needs. The cost to attend Jeri’s House is $500 per month. Pam moved, with second by Vicky, that OCB allocate $500 to pay for the deaf-blind individual discussed earlier to assist with transportation and support him in part or in whole to go to Jeri’s House. There needs to be someone who can handle the money for this individual. It was also suggested that OCB could conduct some sort of fundraiser to assist this individual. Vicky suggested we should get more information, and if necessary, send out a Board poll on this issue.

 Debbie said ACB is trying to create ways everyone can attend the ACB convention. She also noted there is no funding for SBVI’s Older Blind Program to send clients for training. Therefore, this might be a perfect time for OCB to apply for grants to fund projects and services. This would be a great way for OCB to help people who need assistance, such as the situation with the deaf-blind individual. Grants are something the fundraising committee could investigate.

 The next meeting is via Zoom on May 31 at 9am.

 The meeting adjourned at 11:20pm.

 Respectfully Submitted,

 Lynn (Vicky) Golightly, Secretary

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