



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
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DISABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 19th, 2021 at 11:00 AM

VIA Virtual Conference Video Call at:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/323518085>

United States: [+1 \(669\) 224-3412](tel:+16692243412)

Access Code: 323-518-085

Participating: C. Awwad, M. Hayden, J. Vrabely, C. Rafael, H. Pelletier, S. Mancini, M. Voghel

Also in attendance: M. Ahimsa (Staff Interpreter, ADS/BRS, Danbury Office), M. Henry, L. Trusock, C. Ocasio, K. Fradette, A. Goncalves

Meeting Commenced at 11:00 AM

1. Approval of Disability Committee Meeting Minutes from August 5, 2020.

A motion to approve was made by H. Pelletier and seconded by C. Rafael. M. Voghel abstained from the vote. Motion approved.

2. Collaboration with the Department of Aging and Disability Services Update

C. Awwad updated the committee that effective April 1st the NRWIB has one contract fully executed under Aging Services for an Older Worker Virtual Learning Opportunity, and has received funding to bring on a career navigator to recruit older workers aged 55 years and older that meet SCSEP employment eligibility requirements of low income and that are interested in online training. The NRWIB also has additional funding to recruit a job developer to help place those folks into job opportunities after they complete that training. Currently the NRWIB has a job developer on staff and is recruiting for that career navigator. C. Awwad also announced that the NRWIB is working with ADS to put together a 6–8-week summer youth program that will see 50 slots of disabled youth and young adults be placed in work opportunities and will receive a referral letter from their career navigator once their application is complete. The NRWIB is working to develop worksites for those students and would like to pair them with CYEP applicants to create teams and peer mentoring to learn from each other. On April 29th, 2021 the NRWIB hopes to review the online application and start to understand the barriers and disabilities the applicants face so that they may appropriately be placed on a worksite. The program is expected to begin June 1st, 2021. The NRWIB is currently hosting a social media campaign to seek out employers to host students and secure worksite agreements for the summer program, and at this time they still require more employer sites. The students will be on the NRWIB's payroll, not on the employer's payroll. There are no requirements or obligations for the employer to hire



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the student once the program is over. No affirmative action was required for this item. No motion necessary.

3. Ticket to Work Update

C. Awwad informed the committee that the NRWIB is a Ticket to Work Employment Network authorized by the Social Security Administration and the program has done very well. Currently there are 28 customers who have ‘assigned’ their tickets to our Employment Network. These individuals are recipients of SSI and/or SSDI disability benefits and face no risk in losing their benefits by entering this program. The NRWIB continues to vigorously with them to conduct outreach to prospective program participants. The NRWIB has brought on Rukiya Borges, TTW Coordinator, who has a master’s degree in social work who recently attained her certification from Cornell University as a credentialed Work Incentive and Benefits Specialist. These skills will be valuable as the NRWIB serves persons who receive disability benefits. Rukiya also helps the NRWIB run our HomeWorks program which consists of assisting the homeless to get placed in housing and employment programs, and eventually into employment. The program has been very successful. No affirmative action was required for this item. No motion necessary,

4. Robotext Outreach Update

The NRWIB is engaging in a contract with Text-Em-All, Inc. in compliance with Social Security Administration rules, to send out 5,000 text messages to beneficiaries throughout the workforce region’s 41 towns and cities, encouraging them to contact Rukiya regarding the Ticket to Work program. The text message will be simple and introductory, with an option to opt-out of receiving messages, so as not to sound harassing. The Social Security Administration’s Data Marketing POC office will be sending us the 5,000 names and phone numbers. C. Awwad believes this engagement will be beneficial in making residents of our region aware of our Ticket-To-Work program and the fact that the NRWIB serves as an employment network. Text-Em-All, Inc. are aware of and will comply with all the social security requirements and rules that govern this type of outreach. The NRWIB will engage in a short contract with Robotext Outreach which will cost \$840.00 for the 5,000 text messages, and will enable NRWIB staff to follow up with those individuals on a one-on-one basis through a direct phone call after the recipients receive our text. There have been three staff members designated (paperwork approved by the SSA) to have communications and conversations with those individuals that respond to the text message. Robotext is also aware of all the SSA requirements to be the contractor for this program. No affirmative action was required for this item. No motion necessary.

5. Other Business

a. Indicating disability when registering with CTHires

b. Request for American Sign Language Interpreter Services

The NRWIB has done in-house training leading staff members to encourage registrants to self-identify if they have a disability upon program registration, to make them aware that there are additional support services that are available to them. This information is kept completely confidential. It is noted in CTHires that it is important that our performance

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levels are managed based on the barriers that potential clients come to us with. This allows us to understand how we can manage job placements and job retention for clients with disabilities and allows the Federal government to see that we are serving client with disabilities. As the pandemic ebbs and we return to 'normal', we need to be prepared for the occasional request for American Sign Language interpreter services and allow for sufficient time and funding that is needed in order to provide this service.

**Under discussion, C. Awwad informed the Board that the NRWIB hopes to return to in-house services by the beginning of summer and are currently performing CASAS and E-testing in-house by appointment only. The NRWIB wants to make sure they can provide the highest and best services for people with disabilities so they can have every opportunity and be successful as they return to work. Upon returning to service clients in-house, C. Awwad also hopes to resume the 'bootcamp' registrations which prove to be very successful. C. Awwad expressed her appreciation for the work the NRWIB has been able to accomplish in collaboration with Mark Henry, Kerri Fradette, and Cindy Rafael. She informed the committee that the business services unit have been meeting monthly and have been out meeting with employers and creating every opportunity for individuals to successfully be placed into employment. C. Awwad is very thankful for their help and collaboration. C. Awwad also encouraged anyone who is interested in making in-house appointments to do so, as the NRWIB has opened their offices to meet with people by appointment only. Our office will make sure all safety protocols are in place for people to return to the building and that this is done in an appropriate manner. AdultEd participants are starting to return coming into the building and little by little we are getting back to what the new 'norm' looks like. S. Mancini mentioned that in Adult Education, especially when they are taking their GED, accommodations are offered, but the testing service requires documentation of the disability and documentation of the request. S. Mancini asked C. Awwad if the NRWIB will be doing the same. C. Awwad confirmed that we will be following that same protocol, and that is one of the reasons we are asking individuals to self-identify. C. Awwad expressed her concern for situations in which documentation has been destroyed or some of the barriers that individuals face make it difficult to provide the appropriate documentation, and requested that S. Mancini share any helpful ideas she has to overcome these obstacles. C. Rafael expressed her interest in doing training between her AJC Liaisons and CTHires, so that they can support and guide consumers to check the right boxes and provide the right information should they require disability support services. C. Awwad strongly agreed with the idea and mentioned that she will work with K. Maness at CTHires and reach back out to C. Rafael to set something up. C. Rafael also offered to send C. Awwad contact information for ASL interpreters. C. Awwad asked the committee to offer any helpful suggestions they had on recruitment of program participants. M. Henry thanked C. Awwad and M.H ayden for their hard work putting this together for the summer youth program together and expressed his opinion that their work is leading the way for other workforce development programs across the state. M. Voghel informed the committee that the Waterbury Housing Authority continues to remain closed to the public, but they are fully

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operational, and are in the middle of some major remodeling to comply with COVID protocols. They may not be open to the public for some time, but their services are still fully available to anyone in need. C. Awwad would like to set up the next Disability Committee meeting for August and proceed with standing meetings thereafter.

6. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by C. Rafael and seconded by S. Mancini at 11:30 A.M. Motion approved.

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