



UPSTATE WORKFORCE BOARD DISABILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING

December 10, 2021

Noon

Bryant Center

Present:

- Ms. Jennie Thomas, Committee Chair
- Ms. Lisa Thomas, Committee Member
- Ms. Anne Brock-Trail, Committee Member
- Ms. Jennifer Pitts, Committee Member
- Ms. Nikoya Shaw, UWB
- Ms. Dana Wood, UWB

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 12:24 pm by Ms. Thomas, Committee Chair. Ms. Thomas welcomed committee members and allowed a few moments for introductions.

Exploration of Disabilities Opportunities

Ms. Dana Wood, UWB Associate Director, reminded the committee that there was discussion on obtaining funds for a driving simulator to be used by students and individuals with disabilities. She shared that committee members visited the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR). Ms. Lisa Thomas shared with the group that all seven Spartanburg County school districts sent a representative to demo the simulator at ICAR as well. She reported that after seeing it, the schools are very interested in securing one for use by all school districts. Ms. Lisa Thomas reminded the group that the top-notch equipment runs around \$76,000 initially and that there would be a yearly maintenance charge.

The committee discussed moving forward with a letter to Spartanburg County to request CARES Act funding for the simulator. Ms. Wood shared that the county received roughly \$63 million in CARES Act funding. Ms. Lisa Thomas shared that the school districts also received CARES Act funding, but to her knowledge it cannot be used for this project. Ms. Wood noted that this simulator will be housed at one of the school's career centers, but could be used by all school districts. She also shared that the equipment could be used by organizations in the community that serve individuals with disabilities. Ms. Wood informed the committee that she would regroup with Ms. Ann Angermeier, UWB Executive Director, to get the letter to the county. Ms. Wood noted the contribution to the letter by Mr. Chris Sparrow, Committee Member, sharing his personal experience and the benefit he received by using the simulator.

Ability ASCEND

Ms. Wood shared a new opportunity she was made aware of. She shared that the Greenville Workforce Board (GWB)'s disabilities committee is through Greenville CAN. Ms. Wood informed the committee of a program called Ability ASCEND, similar to Veteran ASCEND, but specific to individuals with disabilities. Ms. Wood shared that the Greenville Workforce Board has built-in funds for licenses to pilot this program to increase employment for the disabled population. She wanted to find out from the committee if they would be supportive of our local area perusing a pilot of the Ability ASCEND program to cover the areas served by the Upstate Workforce Board. The committee discussed this new opportunity and all members present were on board with moving forward with a pilot of Ability ASCEND if funding could be secured. She shared that after the pilot program, employers would be required to cover the cost if they wanted to continue to use the service.

Meeting Times

The committee discussed changing the meeting times from 8:30 a.m. to the afternoon. Some members shared that they are flexible with timing. It was shared by members that work with the school district that a 2:30 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. meeting would be better. The committee agreed with a 3:00 p.m. start time. The committee did not determine what day of the week would be best for this meeting. Ms. Wood informed the group that a poll would be sent to decide the best day to meet. Ms. Wood also shared that communication regarding the new day will be sent to the committee after the poll vote so that new meetings can be rescheduled.

Other Business

Ms. Wood asked committee members if there were any other resources or ideas to serve the disabled populations. Ms. Jennie Thomas, Committee Chair, shared that offering ergonomic workstations would be great for individuals who cannot sit for long periods. Ms. Wood shared that ergonomic workstation would be a great addition for job search clients in the resource room. Ms. Jennifer Pitts, Committee Member, shared that the Charles Lea Center uses a device called Nucleus. She shared that the device helps Job Coaches and clients troubleshoot without physically seeing each other. Ms. Lisa Thomas shared that Mr. Jerome Rice, the new Mayor of Spartanburg, and his wife work at the school and are passionate about helping to serve the needs of individuals and students with disabilities. She recommended building a relationship with Mr. Rice.

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:59 p.m. The next meeting is to be determined.