**MDRS BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

**November 07, 2023**

**Board Members Present:** Curtis Dupree, Presley Posey, Dr. Edney, Dr. Jennifer Boykin, Ginger Koestler, Wendy Clemons

**Board Members Absent:** Kim Benton, Mr. Anderson, Wendy Bailey, Dr. Morgigno,

S**taff Present:** Chris Howard, Billy Taylor, Andy Salin, Kellie Rushing, Dorothy Young, Kris Geroux, Paula Brown, Anita Naik, Jennifer Gray, Kevin Bishop, Samandra Murphy, Josh Woodward, Joyce Williams, and Kelly Angulo.

**Staff Members Absent:** LaVonda Hart

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by **Curtis Dupree.**

1. **APPOROVAL OF MINUTES Mr. Dupree** asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes from August 08, 2023, and, there being none, a motion to accept the minutes as submitted was made by **Dr. Edney** and seconded by **Dr. Boykin.** The motion was voted on and passed unanimously.
2. **OLD BUSINESS**
3. **NEW BUSINESS**
4. **Office of Special Disabilities Update: Anita Naik**

**Ms. Naik** began her update by sharing that she had a few updates for the Office of Special Disability Programs. She said she was going to try to make it short, but as everyone knows, most of what they do is involving the home and community based waiver clients on the Independent Living Waiver and the Traumatic Brain/Spinal Cord Injury Program. She shared as of last Friday, they currently have enrolled 2,559 individuals On the IL waiver and 822 on the TBI/SCI Waiver. She noted that case managers are continuing to enroll, as they have a goal to get up to 3,000 slots for the IL Waiver and 1,000 on the TBI/SCI Waiver. She noted they have continued to keep assessing and keep their clients out of the nursing home. She went on to share that they are also preparing for their Federal 704 report which will be due to the Administration of Community Living by December 23. She went on to share that they are currently working on bringing back the Unmasking Brain Injury Program, so they have a session at the end of that week at MRC, she said what that involves is they invite individuals who have a TBI, and it is a way to tell their story and their emotions, how they fell, what their goals and what their outlook is going to be a year from now. **Ms. Naik** said that they were excited to kick off that, that was going to be their first event this year.

**Ms. Naik** continued by sharing that they are going live with Electronic Visit Verification, she noted she has been talking about this forever, but that they would go live November 16, 2023, and they have one counselor or case manager in every district, so all the person can start every time on the mobile app. She noted, so they will clock in and clock out and the process is supposed to be very streamlined, so she is excited, because it does alleviate the current process of having the paper time sheet, which does cause errors and so forth, she noted again she is excited about that. She went on to share that in January of 2024, the Medicaid system is also going to also include the billing component, which means that all of the claims that are generated through the clock in and clock out, they will be able to transmit those electronically through the division of Medicaid and be reimbursed for our personal care attendant services. She shared so there is a lot of changes going on. She shared one more exciting thing she had to report on was they have been doing some research on how to better recruit and retain case managers, so thanks to **Mr. Howard,** he has approved for them to be able to pay for Case Managers to take the Certified Case Manager Examination. She shared it was very comparable to the Certified Counselor on the VR side. She went on to share just to give you a little background on that certification, Case Managers who have Uncertified credit credentials, have the expertise, knowledge and professional experience to provide the right services to patients across the continuing of care, including those withs serious complex medical conditions, and/or catastrophic injuries and illnesses, and in today’s health environments, patients/clients need and advocate on their side. She said Board Certified Case Manager is the right professional to act in an individual’s best interests in a complex healthcare system to provide desirable outcomes for all involved. She went on to share this certification exam is administered by the Commission of Case Managers Certification and is considered the gold standard for Case Management Certification. She noted that this is a 6–8-week time to do the course work for the exam. She then thanked **Mr. Howard** allowing them to do this. She shared they planned to start implementing this January 01, 2024.

**Ms. Naik** shared the last thing she had was that they also were in the process of adding new staff to OSDP, and they have advertised and are in the process of interviewing for three training specialists. She noted that they will have one in the North, Central and South and so to try to alleviate some of the burden of the District Managers, they are also running Vacant Caseloads and trying to hire new staff, train new staff, so these Training Specialist are going to try to take some of this workload off District Managers.

1. **Disability Determination Services Update: Samandra Murphy**

**Ms. Murphy** began her update by sharing that she just had a couple of updates for the board. She said as she always does that they go by the state and federal fiscal year, and so they closed out the federal fiscal year September 30, 2023 and so all of their workload targets are in line that date, so for FY 2023, their target and initial clearances was 25, 236 claims and they made 97.48% of that target, clearing 24, 600 of those initial claims, she noted their refund target was 5, 371 and they closed 92.98 % of those claims out 4, 494. **Ms. Murphy** said they exceeded their CDR Target which was 7, 302 and they closed out a little over 80 of what their actual target was. She went on to share their total target for the year was 41, 792 claims and they closed out 97.20% of those cases at 40, 62. She went on to share as everyone has heard her talk about over the last year about their losses and their struggles to hire, she thinks its exceptional when the staff was able to accomplish even with the amount of staff that they have. She went on to express that she is extremely proud of them and they closed the year out the last week of October, but having just their annual spirit week activities and just a lot of things that they have accomplished over the year and just celebrate everything they have achieved.

**Ms. Murphy** went on to share that additionally at the end of the year,they came very close to meeting all of their workload targets, but they also met all of their accuracy targets that were enforced by SSA. She went on to share that the overall accuracy for the entire year was 91.4% and then going into the month of October, which is in FY2024, their initial accuracy thus far was 95.8%. She noted that they are really looking forward to continuing to grow in terms of improving the quality of the work that they do and ensuring they are providing policy compliant determination to their claimants and she said she was happy to hear a lot of feedback from their staff. She said everyone was on board with quality improvement and making sure they are making the right decisions and following the policy that is set forth by SSA. She noted so she thinks that they are headed in the right direction by that. She said that she was also happy to share that along with **Mr. Howard**, his support, **Ms. Williams**, and the HR Departmentalong with SSA, approving the funding and all of their work with SPB, they have now increased their examiner start salary up to $39, 376.00. She said that they are hoping within the next couple of weeks they will give that an even number at straight up $40, 000, for their examiner start salary, which means they are also working to increasing the start salary for all of the individuals on that career ladder, so their examiners are eligible for a reclassification each year, which means that the complexity of the case type they perform will be added to their caseload in addition to an increase in the number of cases that they receive. She went on to share that all of the examiners along that career ladder are looking forward to implementing increases for them as well. **Ms. Murphy** shared that she thinks that has been helpful she thinks in decreasing the number of staff they are losing. She noted that for the month of September they only had 1 loss, October, no losses, and then for November they have 1 resignation that is going to occur towards the end of the month, so the salary increases along with the fact the Federal Government is not currently hiring, as they were losing a lot of their staff to SSA, because they are under a hire freeze, she thinks that is helping with our attrition as well.

**Ms. Murphy** continued by sharing that speaking on that note, she said if you have been following the news, then you know that Congress has yet to establish an FY 2024 budget and their program is 100% Federally funded by SSA, and since they are operating under a continue resolution, through November 17, 203, SSA has placed them on a hiring freeze until all of the budget issues are worked out. She said as soon as that hiring freeze is lifted, they will begin to recruit with their new salary and try to hurry and fill some of those vacancies. She went on to share that hopefully as this new salary takes effect in peoples lives, they will start to see less resignations. She went on to share that whether or not they can end up hiring, they do have a strategic plan in place that they have met a couple of times about trying to use the resources they have in place, and new and innovative ways to try to still meet their goals and increase the number of claimants they can serve this year, decrease their processing time and improve the quality of work they provide, so regardless of what the budget ends up looking like, what the hiring looks like, they are trying new approaches to getting the work done and being more productive even if they aren’t able to bring more staff on.

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation Update: Lavonda Hart**

**Mr. Bishop** updated the board on **Ms. Harts behalf,** sharing that there is lots of great things going on in the VR Program. He shared there is a lot going on, but he was going to focus on just two areas, and that was looking at: students with disabilities and the skills gains that they are trying to get to all individuals. He shared of course their main goal was to help individuals with disabilities go to work, and so there is a lot that goes into that, and the latest law that goes into that really focuses on students. Getting them as early as we can to work with individuals, to get them on the right track to go find that job or find that career. He noted so we are putting a lot of effort into our students with disabilities, working with MDE, with **Ms. Gray** and **Ms. Bailey** to get into the school districts**,** to meet the right people, to work with local school districts, to getting into the schools, so they can get to the students and start doing what they call PRE-ETS which is Pre-Employment Training Services. He noted that they have talked about these before and these are five areas that they work with students on throughout, for as long as they need them they work with students who are eligible for VR Services, they are not applicants yet, they are potentially eligible and they do students who have filled out an application or made eligible and currently **Mr. Bishop** noted they are working with 2,400 students over the state of Mississippi, and they are doing everything they can to raise that number up and he shared thanks to **Mr. Howard**, they are going to add more Transition Counselors across the state. He noted in the past when they would add more Counselors, they would add them to our districts (we have 10 across the state) but he noted that they are really trying to focus in on certain high schools that have large populations and have those populations like in Gulfport or schools in Desoto County or Southaven. He shared they have large schools there and kind of partner that individual with a school, they don’t have multiple schools, so their focus would be on those schools trying to bring as many student into the services as we can. He said like he had said before, they have just a little over 2,400 at the moment

**Mr. Bishop** went on to share other ways they are focusing on this is they are using 3rd party providers, outside companies, that provide these PRE-ETS Services for us and they do it in different ways, and **Mr.** **Bishop** shared **Mr. Woodward** would go into more of something he has kind of led the charge on, but another way is classroom work basically, so these different businesses provide these 3rd parties provide these services, teaching classes, training up the individuals in these areas and we currently have 10 contractors across the state and we are about to put out another request for qualifications (RFQ) to increase that number. He shared there are areas of the state that we are just not in. He noted that we talk about Mississippi being last, but it is a large state when you start looking at it on a map. There are areas that are hard to get to, so they are trying to make sure they have full coverage of these services and besides just dumping it on our Transition Counselors, they are tying to have these 3rd parties going to these areas. They are hoping by doing that, again increasing the number of students with disabilities that we are serving and looking at the future it just grows the number of people that are coming through the VR services, finding employment earlier, and looking at that career, so he said hopefully they can gain the skills they need to move on and not need our services down the road, but of course if they do we are still here.

**Mr. Bishop** continued his update by sharing that another area they focus on is skills gain. He shared that is another area we are entrapped on by our Federal overseers the Rehabilitation Services Administration. He went on to share that skills gain comes from moving on and going to college, going into community colleges, receiving job readiness training or other work base learning activities. He noted that RSA is not just looking at us finding a client and sticking them in a job somewhere, but providing them skills that are going to carry on with those individuals for the rest of their life, so if one job doesn’t work out, they can take those skills and go on to the next job. Then they can find their own job in the future. He went on to share we are currently working with 638 students in the College/University level, we have 283 in Community College, 373 receiving job readiness training and 105 that are currently doing work based learning. He shared that work based learning is one of the things that we are actually working with schools on as well. Schools provide work based learning and then in some cases where they cant, we can step in and help provide those work based learning and actually putting a student into a work setting to help them figure out what they want to do, to help them get the skills they need to do those types of jobs. He shared so those are the two big areas they are working on right now.

Next, **Mr. Bishop** shared there were some numbers he wanted to go through as well.He shared we have to report to RSA quarterly of what is going on. He said so he was going to share with the board where we are at today, and as of November 07, 2023, they have served 8,689 individuals. He noted that was from July 01, 2023- November 07, 2023. They have rehabbed 869, so that is about 10% of the people that are coming through are being placed or are completing our programs. He shared that was as of November 07, 2023, but RSA they do on a quarterly basis, so from July 01, 2023-September 30, 2023 they did 1, 733 new applications, did 1, 462 individual determined services, so those people that applied, 1,400 of them they determined eligible, and from there 1, 401 actually got to the plan level. **Mr. Bishop** shared these are the numbers that will be turned into RSA showing what they are doing. Next he said he wanted to focus on the eligibility. He shared that Eligibility Determination by law they have to move them through that section within 60 days. He noted they are at 95.1% rate of timeliness there, he said that was a really good number and they would love to improve that number. Then he said next was the plan. He said once they are determined eligible there is a time frame they have to do a plan. He shared currently on that our timeliness on that is 96.1% . He shared they are meeting their numbers and meeting their time frame, but they could do better, because those numbers really should be hopefully getting closer to 100%.

1. **Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind Update: Dorothy Young**

**Ms. Young** began her update by sharing that she had a few things to go over that are good things in OVRB. She shared the first good thing they had was their Structure Discovery Training Center. She shared about every board meeting **Mr. Howard** and her report out to the board about the Structure Discovery Training and that is the alternative training for those individuals who are blind or visually impaired, had been leaving our state, and we would pay for them to either go to Minnesota to receive the training at Blind inc. to receive the training, we would pay for them to go to Baltimore to receive the training Louisiana for the Blind. She shared that in the next couple of weeks, they will be finished with their training center in   
Long Beach Mississippi. **Ms. Young** went on to share the training center is not a large training center, compared to the Addie McBryde Center in square footage. She shared they are going to have four main classes and they did that to make sure that they did not interfere with the numbers at the Addie McBryde training center. At this time she showed the layout of the building via pictures on Zoom. She shared this center is totally different from the Addie McBryde Center, as this center sets you up to live independently under sleep shades, so individuals entering this training, will all be under sleep shades. She shared that you have to learn how to live blind. She noted that the main focus of the training center is to cope with living blind. **Ms. Young** shared at the Addie McBryde center there is a dorm that is located on the second floor there. She said that Structure Discover will have no dorms there, you will live in your own apartment. At this time she thanked **Mr. Howard** for working with DFA and all of those involved in Contracts, they now have that lease apartments that the agency will be leasing for our consumers who will be attending this training. She went on to share that the apartments are two bedrooms, we will have them fully furnished and that is where they will be cooking their meals, and taking them to the training center every day because this training center there is no cafeteria to go and have someone prepare your meals for you. You have to do that on you own. She shared they would teach them how to use Uber or Door dash if they so choose, because the training is to help you understand just because you are blind, you can still live a normal life. She said they already had 3 individuals who would be starting in December, employees, they have a Center Director that will be starting, a Technology Instructure, and a Daily Living one. She went on to share when she said 3 it is because they are certified to teach blind training, they are Certified Blind Instructors and they are also Certified in Orientation and Mobility. She went on to note that one of the keys they are going to be teaching at this center is to teach proper training to individuals who are blind, but pushing you are certified in teaching it. She said this was going to be really huge for our state and they were going to take up to 10 clients, they will have 5 in each cohort, but when they open, they will open with just 2-3 clients.

Next, **Ms. Young** shared that she did want to go over their numbers briefly. She said right now they have served 1,310 Mississippians all across the state, they have taken 236 applications, and their goal is to have 750, so they have taken 236 applications, made 196 of that 236 eligible for their services, 193 have been written IPE’s, 6 have training IPE’s and they have closed 46 cases in competitive integrated employment and 10 have received measurable skill gains. She shared their mentoring program they have 4 in their mentoring program, so the counselors and the managers are close to them are out there in the community and they are doing weekly and monthly outreach to increase their numbers, and to get more awareness of the services that we are providing.

**Ms. Young** continued her update by sharing is about working with student. She noted that **Mr. Dupree** brought up the age of starting off at 14. She shared that is really good for the community of the blind. She shared the following is the number of the students they are working with in their students in their high schools, and she mentioned they have a contract with the National Federation of the Blind Peer Mentoring Program, and they are 14-21 year olds, those are who they are working with right now, and right now they have 4 that is in that program, 22-24 they are working with them providing adult coaching, and they have 1 in that program. She shared not enrolled in school and that does not mean they still do not get the services from the agency, they are working with 2 14-21 with the Peer Mentoring, Transition High School Students, they have 16 they are working with in High School, they have 1 that is enrolled in the GED Program and College the Transition Students that are in college, they have 30 that is in college. She shared the total number of Transition Students is 7, the total number of our adult college students 22 and over is 19.

1. **Office of Business Development Update: Josh Woodward Josh’s first paragraph doesn’t make much sense to me. Can we send it to him and ask him to do his best with it ?**

**Mr. Woodward** began his update by sharingduring the last board meeting I spoke on two on-going Business Development projects: the job extravaganzas and the upcoming job fair plans for 2024. As far as the JE’s are going he talked about upcoming events in the first quarter of 2024, while they continue to prepare and complete the RFQ process for large scale, long term contracts. Up to the point of the board meeting, he shared they had completed 4 events with three vendors. The events were located in Olive Branch, Madison, Pearl, and the Gulf Coast.

**Mr. Woodward** continued his update by sharing their plan for job fairs is to expand the program to provide 10 fairs next year. One in each of the MDRS district. The goal of this is to provide the job fair resource to each of the districts and also to provide the resource to the clients who will not benefit from the three major job fairs due to travel restriction. He noted that their first fair will be in Hernando and they plan to start in February. He shared they will also will do a combination of partnering with the Governor’s Job Fair Network and producing them by ourselves.

1. **ABLE Update: Billy Taylor**

**Mr. Taylor** began his update by sharingthat he was going to talk about ABLE, which is our program here that allows individuals with disabilities to save money in a special ABLE bank account, and keep their benefits in place. He shared it is our newest program here, we just launched it about 4.5 years ago in June, 2019. He said he was just going to give just a little snapshot of where we are here with it, we have 370ish accounts opened up so far with about 2 million in total assets in our ABLE Program. **Mr. Taylor** shared he did the math this morning and it is about $5,000-6,000 average in each ABLE account, which he shared speaks to him the importance of it. Before ABLE was around, people who were getting an SSI check or was on the Medicaid Waiver, could only have just a couple thousand dollars in their name of that benefit would be jeopardized, but with an ABLE Account, it has allowed people to save just a little bit more money in their name to ensure covering expenses that come living a lifetime with a disability. He went on to share it has been exciting to see the program build from the ground up, growing a little each month and each year. He went on to share there are some great benefits with ABLE, there a couple of tax benefits at the state tax level, they get an income tax deduction, and at the Federal Tax level the money in the ABLE Account grows income tax free. He said he always tells people that is not the reason the law was passed, to go give people with disabilities those tax benefits, but of course the main reason is to save money in their name and keep their benefits in place. He shared it was nice of Congress and our State Legislature to along the way bestow those additional benefits to the ABLE Account Owners. **Mr. Taylor** went on to share there is some good news with ABLE, so currently to be eligible for an ABLE Account, you had to have your disability occur in your life prior to the age of 26. So it is really geared towards those individuals that are going to be living their who lifetime with those additional expenses that come with having a disability. He next shared that now that the program has been up and running a couple of years, Congress was able to look at the numbers and how much the program affected the Federal budget, and they were able to take a look at that and realize that they could up that age and still accomplish the goals of the program, so starting on January 01, 2026, the ABLE Age Adjustment Act that was just passed, will go into effect and that will change the eligibility age from 26 up to 46. He noted so on that date anyone who had a disability occur prior to the age of 46 will then be eligible to for an ABLE Account.

Next, **Mr. Taylor** updated everyone on the buildings. He shared that is has been a priority with Mr. Howard to make sure that the staff and the 46 offices are as safe as they could make it. Mr. Taylor shared it is a little bit of a balance they must keep he feels, because on one hand we are a state agency that serves individuals with disabilities, and we want to be available and welcoming, and have our doors open to individuals to come in and receive our services and have a welcoming environment. On the other hand, we have almost 1,000 employees at our agency and we want to take the steps that are necessary to protect them and have the possible trouble kept out of the office, so that is really a balance that they have attempted to strike, and the way they have done that is taking a few different steps. They have put in pretty much of all 46 offices, somewhat of access control, and he shared when he says that, he means his employee badge is now set up to swipe at the door, to let you in the building. He went on to note that we also have cameras at all of our MDRS Offices, that are set up mainly in the parking lot, common areas as they feel like those have been a good general deterrence to crime as well. He noted that there are really cool features on the cameras, that they are just in the beginning process of learning what they can do. He shared they worked with IT and they have facial recognition software, where you can put in a person’s face and if something seemed wrong with them or they seemed unhappy when leaving one of the offices, there is an alert that goes off to let you know they are on the premises. He repeated they are learning about all of this software and about 6 months in and are just kind of playing with the software, and it has been proven successful thus far. The ultimate arrangement for all offices to is to have in all of the offices a holding room right inside the door where they are buzzed in and have to request which counselor, they are there to speak to.

He shared next was the building locations. They have had a lot of leases come up for renewal that are 10-20 year leases and they are looking at those to make sure those are just the spot in town you want to be. He shared Greenwood is a good example. We just moved our AW Office there across town. He said we were having a ton of issues at that location and it was kind of known as a bad area of town and crime reports from that area were increasing., so we knew the lease was up for renewal, so we moved that location across town to a safe area. He shared that was something they were continuing to do, as these leases come up for renewal.

1. **Internal Audit Update**: **Kellie Rushing**

**Ms. Rushing** began her update by sharing the 4 facilities that they audited this past quarter.

* Ability Works of Jackson: There were 9 instances where cash receipts logs were not completed for deposit, (this is small amounts of cash and when they were emptying vending machines onsite) and this was training issue where a new employee was not aware she was supposed to be doing a cash receipt log. The facility manager took responsibility, and it was rectified., once instance where a client had an incomplete I-9.
* Ability Works Harrison County- 1 instance in which the timecard did not match the productivity track.
* Ability Works of Meridian- No Findings
* Ability Works of Brookhaven- Purchase Order # 2917 which had only one approving signature, 3 instances in which corrections were not initialed on timecards, and 1 instance where the time card did not match productivity track production record. Also 1 instance where a client had a incomplete I-9

**Other Business:** She shared that this summer one of her internal auditors had the opportunity to attend a Internal Audit Conference. Specifically, Government Risk and Compliance. She shared when they go to these conferences, they always come back with what they call a take away. What is one thing they can bring back that they can test out or try out here in Mississippi, just to see if they like it. She shared from this conference what they grabbed out of that conference was feedback through 60. She explained what that is is they went to a breakout session and the speakers were very heavily telling them don’t wait until your exit conference or during an audit to have a meaningful or engaged conversation with your auditees. With **Mr. Howards** support they sent out a notice to all of the facility managers letting them know they were going to be trying this out. She shared how they are doing it here is they are sending out a teams notification they are conducting this via teams she shared just for convenience purposes and they sit down with facility manager and whomever else they choose to have on the call and they talk about “what is working for you?’ “Is there anything we can do better as the Internal Auditors to help your experience?” or any questions they have. So far it has been it has been positive and trying to open doors of communication and improve where they need to.

**External Audit Update:** She noted last meeting she noted they had their entrance conference with Carr, Riggs and Ingram and that was July 25 and this was for their AW Financial Audit. She shared they have received the draft of the final financial audit and there were not findings noted.

1. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT: Chris Howard**

**Mr. Howard** began his update by sharing that they are continuing to work hard with the in range adjustments, that the State Personnel Board has given them the authority to do. He shared they have really tried to hit it hard and back in September they gave counselors in VR, VRB and OSDP, the full 10% and Counselor Assistants they did in October and Examiners they did in October as well. He said they are really trying to work hard to get the salaries up for the front line workers to hopefully keep them. He shared that one cool thing is he asked **Ms. Williams** to look and see how many departures we had in those classifications and they had 0. He noted that they lost no counselors in VR, VRB, OSDP and no examiners in DDS. He is hoping that will continue getting the pay scale up and giving people the opportunity to telework he is hoping it is working, and folks are wanting to stay. He reiterated that losing 0 front line workers in October is pretty incredible considering from what we have been dealing with from 2020 to now.

**Mr. Howard** continued by sharing they have been doing District Meetings, so they have been going around the state and reach all of our staff and tell them what is going on and thank them for the work they are doing. He shared he has taken he has take about five of the Executive Team Members to talk about different things. He shared he had **Mr. Stubbs**, as well as one other gentleman who is doing disability etiquette, he said he thought that that was important that when we have new staff that we continue to talk about Disability Etiquette and we are doing that and we are also doing active shooter training he noted. He said he told the staff, this is not something he really wants to do, but in the environment we are in, like **Mr.** **Taylor** said, it not only important we safe guard our offices, but we also train ourself if something were to happen. He said between the Active Shooter Training and the HR Updates **Ms. Williams** is doing, it is about a 2 day training this year. Mt. Howard shared they are really trying to get back into training. As it is key in training our new staff, but keeping our existing staff. He went on to share they are about to wrap them up, they have Oxford and Tupelo next week and the state office after Thanksgiving and then they will have wrapped up all of their District Meetings. He did share that everything was going good with them thus far.

**Mr. Howard** went on to update that October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, **Ms. Gray** and her team along with Business Development, they all did a fantastic job with everyone getting out there and talking about the agency, and he said **Ms. Gray** reported to him that they did 20 different engagements, whether that be live radio or speaking in front of groups, **Mr. Howard** reported that was 20 just in the month of October. He shared with the board that is as a great job to **Ms. Gray** and her team and Mr. Woodward and his team, because that was most he shared they have ever done. He shared that something else they had coming up, was that Friday, they will be on Good Things with Rebecca on Super Talk Radio, she has invited Ms. Culpepper and Milwaukee Tools are going to be on there talking about their Project Search Partnership. He said he thought he had mentioned it before, but they have 22 Project Search Sites, with a majority of them in Hospitals, they do have a couple in Military Bases. He shared to be on Supertalk talking about that partnership, he thinks that is going to be really good as they try to reach additional school districts and additional employers.

Next, **Mr. Howard** talked about the Session. He shared session was coming up in two months**.** Hesaid just to update the board, **Mr. Salin** presented the budget last time, and they are going to be asking for a 1.6 million dollar increase in State Funding, once the session rolls around, that will take us from 31.6 million to 31.2 million. **Mr. Howard** shared just to break down that 1.6 million, 1.1 million would allow us to give the PCA’s, OSDP and TBI another dollar increase, that would take them to $12 an hour and then $500,000 would be for the section 110 grant for VR and VRB, that would be the state match on the additional Federal Money they anticipate on receiving He went on to share something else they will be asking for this year is the opportunity or the ability to pay for degrees. What **Mr. Howard** said he wanted to do was use this as a recruiting tool to be able to go into Mississippi State, Jackson State, Alcorn, Southern, and Ole Miss and to be able to go in there to these young adults who are in school, seeking a counseling degree and say hey we could help you finish school if you agree to work with us a certain number of years, so he said they were excited about that and also they feel like that is going to be good, because we have a number of counselor assistants who would actually make great counselors, but the only thing keeping them from that is the degree. He said so if we could help individuals in helping them reach their degree in counseling, again with a contract stating that they will work with us for a number of years, he feels like that would be fantastic for recruiting and retaining. He shared he has talked with RSA and RSA has agreed that we could claim that on the Federal Grant, so that is really good from the VR/VRB standpoint. He shared he tried to push this last year, but found out it has to be in our general language, not in our appropriations bill. Mr. Howard shared the one thing he wanted to close on, was they were in Savannah Georgia at CSAVR and he said there was one speaker speaking and she said this and he wrote it down it says “Everyday you have the opportunity to impact a lifetime for someone you serve.” He said he has been using that in their district meetings, that every single day the services they provide everyday could impact a lifetime for the person they are serving.

1. **OTHER BUSINESS**
2. **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, **Chairman Dupree** made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Curtis Dupree, Chairman**  **Chris Howard, Secretary**