**Voice Options Program (VOP) Biannual Stakeholder Meeting**

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 2, 2021

1. **Call to Order**

Megan Sampson called meeting to order at 1:34PM.

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Staff

* Megan Sampson, Chief, Independent Living and Assistive Technology Section (ILATS)
* Timothy Burkhart, Voice Options Grant Administrator
* Scott Harris, Voice Options Grant Administrator

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Staff

* Brent Jolley
* Tyrone Chin
1. **Voice Options Program Update**

Chief Megan Sampson reviewed the distributed VOP reporting data with stakeholders.

* Noted that since launch on July 1, 2020, we have completed 183 Short-Term Loans (STL)
* Pointed out discrepancy in Short-Term Loan (183 count) to Long-Term Loan numbers (124): we must receive invoice, receipts, and consumer surveys/data before they can be counted as completed LTLs, even if the individual has received their device and equipment
* In talks with new Providers, which will add an additional six offices providing In-Person services to consumers
* California coverage for In-Person services: 72%

Chief Sampson walked stakeholders through general Program processes for context.

* Program adjusted to offering In-Person and remote services due to COVID-19 pandemic
* New Providers are shipped iPads with speech applications pre-loaded for demonstrations and STLs, and provided training
* Consumers receive demonstration and take STL device home for 2-14 days to trial
* Consumer returns STL device, Provider procures and provides new device, speech app, and any ancillary equipment (Long-Term Loan) to consumer

Chief Sampson continues walking stakeholders through VOP data.

* 58% of consumers were referred to VOP by Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs)
* Most consumers under age 10
* Many consumers reported they used their Voice Options device to make their first phone call ever
* Touch Chat HD and Go TALK NOW PLUS are most popular speech applications (also offer Predictable, Proloquo4Text, and LAMP Words for Life)
* Noted large percentage of consumers under 17 yrs of age, partially due to increased difficulty for students to receive speech-generating devices from their schools during COVID-19
* Largely serving individuals with Autism, Developmental Disabilities, Cerebral Palsy, and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)
* Noted improved emotional and mental wellbeing – device gives consumers a voice and the ability to express and advocate for themselves
* Individuals qualified to certify a consumer as being eligible for the VOP: Licensed SLPs, Family Physician, Licensed Physician Assistant, Developmental Pediatrician, Audiologist, Nurse Practitioner, Rehabilitation Counselor, and State/Federal Agency
1. **Questions or Comments**
* Does the VOP staff know how consumers are utilizing the Touch Chat app, as it has a variety of page settings?
	+ Chief Sampson: We demonstrate a variety of page sets to Providers so they may ensure the consumer can functionally grow with the application, and increase the complexity as needed.
* What outreach is happening to organizations serving adults and older individuals?
	+ Scott Harris: We identify a county and either age range or disability type that impacts speech, then reach out to every organization, support group, or business that serves that demographic. This occurs weekly. Contacts established help share info, make referrals, and sometimes become Providers themselves
* Chat question: Since 65% of consumers are 22 or younger, are you gathering data whether they receive or are directed to SLP services to support their learning the device?
	+ Chief Sampson: Not actively pursing educational systems, actually targeting 30yrs and above, but school districts are referring each other to us. We offer variety of training materials to our SLP’s, as well providing ongoing support, but so far all of them have been familiar with our applications.
	+ Scott Harris: The Providers typically act as the middle man and can either provide the consumer extra support using the application, or help connect the consumer to an SLP.
	+ Chief Sampson: When consumers come to a Provider, they are given a demonstration of two to three applications that best suit them (based on assessed level of literacy and ability to manipulate the device/application). Consumers are encouraged to use their STL device in every situation possible to see if it actually suits them. Providers will continue to work with the consumer until they are fully able to utilize their speech-application/device.
* Chat question: What data are you collecting about actual use during the short-term loan period?
	+ Chief Sampson: We are collecting data including: total number phone calls made, whether phone calls were successful or not, purposes for telephone calls made, any additional equipment acquired (protective cases, keyboards, mounts, etc.), which speech application was selected, and consumer demographics (race/ethnicity, disability types, gender, county of residence). We do not track personal information/device track our consumers.
* Chat question: In the words of consumers, how are people benefitting from the device?
	+ Scott Harris: We send out Consumer Surveys after 30 and 90 days. Asks which application is being used, what method of communication was used prior to receiving the VOP device, the helpfulness of demonstrations and training, whether the Provider fulfilled all their obligations, their primary language, frequency of speech-application use, their phone call frequency and success rate, their satisfaction of Provider support, their ease of use regarding the device, and their predicted device/application use moving forward.
* Chat question: Are you confirming whether program participants have access to health care funding (i.e. Medi-Cal or insurance) to access ongoing SLP services?
	+ Chief Sampson: We agree continued support is needed; our Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are trained to provide information and discuss benefits and services. Consumers wanting employment can receive training and services from DOR as well.
* Chat question: What are the “Personnel Costs” associated with the Long-Term Loans?
	+ Chief Sampson: Providers can request up to $2,500 in reimbursement per consumer, $1,500 for hardware and $1,000 for personnel expenses. We only reimburse for actual expenses, and the average LTL cost is $1,855.79, well below $2,500. SLP’s are contractually not allowed to bill consumers (or consumer’s insurance) for their time spent going over VOP info or demonstrations, as we reimburse them for their time (no “double-dipping”).
* Who provides orientation and training?
	+ Chief Sampson: Tim and Scott provide orientations and training to Providers, and Providers provide demonstrations to consumers. This involves multiple and continued monthly meetings to ensure Providers are comfortable, whether they need devices, if they need extra training, etc. Also direct them to our YouTube training and manuals for additional reference. We do warm hand-offs to ensure a new Provider can comfortably and effectively serve VOP Consumers.
1. **Action Items**

Chief Sampson requested Stakeholders provide feedback to be prepared for next Stakeholder meeting (December 16th, 2021):

* What speech applications do you suggest we add, or use to replace less-sought applications?
* Ideas for innovative means of expanding our Program to different age groups (predominately 30yrs and older)?
* What topics would you like discussed at the December 2021 Stakeholder meeting?
* Ideas for outreach methods and/or target demographics?
* Potential consumer survey questions?

Please submit your feedback and suggestions to VoiceOptions@dor.ca.gov.

1. **Adjournment**

The meeting closed at 2:44pm.