PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE
February 1, 2011

Minutes

In attendance: John Nuances, Stevey Bruce, Joy Efron, Parisa LaMarra, Barbara Oberle, Ron Smith, Charlotte and Marty Stradtman, Mike Tanner and Diane Wilkinson. Staff attending: Sally Jameson and Adama Dyoniziak.
Not in attendance: Caryl Crahan, Dr. Bertha Melgoza and Dr. George Lobley.

The meeting opened with a brief review of the contents of the packet that was mailed to every committee member. A number of people commented about how interesting it was to see the array of classes that are offered by all the Regional Centers.

Dr. Smith asked how we assess the value of these classes for our students. Adama Dyoniziak explained Braille’s outcome assessment process using follow-up phone calls and pre- and post-enrollment surveys and other survey instruments. Regional Directors also commented on how they use informal feedback from students to assess their classes. Lisa Jimenez, Rancho Mirage Regional Director, said they conduct student forums in order to have a regular process to get feedback from students about all aspects of their programs.

Committee chair John Nuances posed the question about how we determine what classes to offer given that there are limited resources. He prefaced this with comments about the need for computer classes and the importance of technology, with which everyone agreed.

Sally Jameson indicated that a task force was recently formed to review and determine what is taught in our computer classes and the kind of hardware and software needed to support the computer programs in each of our centers. She said that she would report back to the Program Review committee on the work of the task force at the next meeting.

Mike Tanner asked about the Solutions in Sight campaign and how it is working. Sally reported that parts of the program are working well and other parts are being retooled. Specifically, we will be enhancing our website, employing some new marketing and advertising strategies and will be building the Ambassador part of the program. He commented that the small information cards were especially effective. Adama reported that the lifestyle themes were working well although it was noted that some Braille Institute students don’t like the new names of existing classes and see no need for these lifestyle themes. Adama explained that the themes are intended to attract new students unfamiliar with Braille Institute or who don’t relate to programs for blind or visually impaired people.
Discussion ensued about the problem with Braille Institute’s name being a barrier for many people seeking services. Sally explained about the branding program and the decision to add a tagline rather than change the name of Braille Institute, which has a great deal of equity in the name.

San Diego Regional Director Jay Comstock noted that while our classes are an important part of our services, socialization in a major factor. He said people come to our centers because they can connect and relate to others dealing with the same issues. This was reinforced by others on the committee.

Diane Wilkinson asked if we can handle more people in the classrooms at each of our Centers. Sally Jameson said that it varies from center to center about space and that we are continually looking at the ways to provide the socialization and programs for people who have been attending Braille for many years while making classes available for new students.

John Nuanes noted that there are waiting lists for the computer classes in Los Angeles and asked about that at other centers, especially since so many people are interested in computer classes. Sally said she would report back to the committee about the status of waiting lists for all classes at each center.

Parisa LaMarra, parent of a blind infant, said that socialization is very important for children and suggested that Braille really concentrate on this in the youth program. She also suggested programs that explain the eye and eye diseases so our youth can understand it and be knowledgeable enough to explain it to others when asked. The Committee agreed that this should be a priority and applies to all ages. Sue Parker-Strafaci, Director of Child Development, further stated that the Child Development staff must work closely with parents on transition for children from preschool to elementary school and the issues related to that transition. While it was mentioned that Parent Groups for those with kids in our Youth Program might be useful, it was noted how difficult it is to connect with parents due to time constraints, work, single-parent households, etc.

Physical activity and fitness were also mentioned as topics of interest among adult students in addition to the health benefits of these kinds of programs. It was noted that there was a successful hiking program offered in Los Angeles but there were many students in Los Angeles who heard about it after the fact—and who would have been interested. As a result, the Committee agreed that there needs to be better internal communication about the availability of programs. And, that there may be students at one Regional Center who might be interested in programs at another Center.

Joy Efron said that she found the compilation of Braille Institute classes so informative, she sent the information to a listserv for educators, saying that Braille should more widely circulate information to many groups regardless of their special interest in programs by age group.
With technology a running theme throughout the meeting, Mike Tanner said that while computer classes are vitally important, he also feels that instruction about everyday electronics (remote controls, cell phones, appliances, etc) are equally important and of interest. He also mentioned a course he had heard of called “The Blind Handyman” and everyone on the committee felt workshops on these topics would be very popular and helpful. It was suggested we determine what kinds of seminars or workshops of this nature we want to offer and then specifically recruit volunteers to teach them. Other topics suggested included language classes (such as Spanish) and understanding of the different generations. It was noted we should explore our internal resources for some of these, as some Braille students may be able to teach such programs. The idea of utilizing the computer/tech know-how of kids in our Youth program to teach our adult students was suggested.

There was some discussion about the mix of generations we see among our student/client population, with differing needs and interests and the challenge this poses to the program staff. John Nuanes specifically asked about what Braille is doing for the young adult who enrolls in classes who have different needs and interests than the seniors who often make up the bulk of the classes. Sally Jameson said that Braille has recently retooled its Young Adult program and, in the interest of time, would report back to the committee about efforts in this area at the next meeting.

Sally Jameson said she would develop a list of the follow-up items and key topics that were raised in the meeting and circulate it to the committee in order for the committee to determine what it would like to review and discuss at future meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.