



State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services

DDS

DRAFT Minutes of the July 21, 2022 Meeting

Location: Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

In attendance: Adrienne Benjamin, Pam DonAroma, Christine Hainsworth-Straus, Karen Hlavac, Rick Lenz, Rick Rothstein, Patti Silva, Deb Ullman, Lisa Weisinger-Roland, Kevin Zingler

Absent: Joe Duffy, Diana Mennone, Arlene Reith

DDS Staff: Elisa Velardo, Deputy Commissioner; Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson; Peter Mason, DDS ARPA Coordinator (TWR); Kevin Bronson, Director of Communications, Legislation, & Regulation; Rod O'Connor, Legislative and Regulations Specialist (TWR)

Introductions

Kevin Zingler, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM.

Moment of Silence for those affected by COVID-19

Mr. Zingler called for a moment of silence for those affected by COVID.

Opportunity for Public Participation

Fay Lenz was present but had no comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the June 23, 2022 special meeting were approved without correction on a motion by Deb Ullman, seconded by Adrienne Benjamin.

DDS Ombudsperson's Report

Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson, discussed the [Ombudsperson Monthly Report July 2022](#). Rick Lenz asked if the Ombudsperson's office give assistance to persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families. Ms. Jacovino said that she has had quite a few calls but there are not a lot of services for the ASD community. She recommends connecting with advocacy groups, ADS' Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Social Services' Division of Autism Spectrum Disorder Services, and community social services departments.

Karen Hlavac asked Ms. Jacovino whether there were questions about direct care staffing crisis. What is DDS doing on staffing? Ms. Jacovino said she received calls concerning day services staffing and finding programs for individuals. The issue of staffing is important to families. Ms. Hlavac asked what the Council could do to support the department's efforts to deal with the staffing issues. Deputy Commissioner Elisa Velardo said that DDS was working with the qualified providers on having safe plans in place and staffing issues with the number of new employees that were being hired.

Ms. Jacovino responded to a question offered by Mr. Lenz on the use of cameras in programs. She said that this was a complicated issue and she was still learning about it. The issue comes up when families want to use

cameras in for the purpose of health and safety and preventing abuse or neglect. Ms. Jacovino said that there was a DDS Human Rights Committee (HRC) process for allowing for the use of cameras.

Deputy Commissioner's Report

Deputy Commissioner Velardo stated that DDS was working with other state human services agencies and the Department of Administrative Services on staffing and hiring initiatives. These staffing issues are partially due to the wave of retirements of state employees. She noted that Shannon O'Brien was now the West Region Regional Director, Cres Secchiaroli was now the South Region Regional Director, Patricia West is now Regional Director for Public Services and Kathy Hanewicz is the Regional Director of the Southbury Training School.

Deputy Commissioner Velardo discussed DDS's [Fourth Tuesday Forums on Innovative Options \(ct.gov\)](#). Some of the topics being discussed are Supportive Housing, Individualized Home Supports (IHS), Assistive Technology, and Community Companion Homes (CCH). Ms. Hlavac asked how the information about these forums was being disseminated. Ms. Velardo responded that the information was sent to DDS staff, The Arc, qualified providers, and Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) were notified. The forums notices are posted on the DDS website. All the forums are recorded and can be found on the Fourth Tuesday Forum webpage.

The Deputy Commissioner discussed an Assistive Technology Conference that was held in Mystic, CT where she provided opening remarks. Ms. Velardo talked about DDS working with the State Employment Leadership Network around strategic planning around opportunities to increase employment. DDS has a stakeholders group composed of DDS employees, families and providers that have made recommendations, which will help with the ongoing systems transformation with the ARPA initiatives.

Ms. Benjamin discussed hiring issues for private providers including the salary and pay structure between a manager and an assistant manager. Deputy Commissioner Velardo said that some of this issue had to do with federal law on who can get overtime and who is salaried.

Topics of Discussion

Update on DDS American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) Initiatives and Workgroups

Peter Mason, former DDS Deputy Commissioner and current DDS ARPA Initiative Coordinator, gave a presentation "Movin' On" on all the various initiatives that DDS is anticipating using ARPA funding for. He explained that Section 9817 allowed states to apply to bill for an additional 10% match for federal Medicaid assistance and use those additional funds for transformational changes. For Connecticut that match is about \$200 million. The additional funding was expected to be used for expanding eligibility and expanding access to the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers, including for those individuals on the waiting list.

Mr. Mason discussed the specific approved DDS ARPA Plan that includes funding to: (1) stabilize providers and temporary workforce enhancement; (2) increase access to assistive technology; (3) create an employment network for individuals who self-hire staff; (4) expand self-directed services; (5) expand supportive housing; (6) stabilize and improve provider's technology infrastructure; (7) update the case manager system and database; (8) conduct a comprehensive review of the Level of Need (LON) Assessment and the Universal Assessment; (9) upgrade and enhance the DDS critical incident management system; (10) expand and improve the National Core Indicators participant survey; and (11) study and recommend ways of creating an outcome-based incentive program for providers.

Mr. Mason went on to discuss what transformational change might look like for DDS including having individuals move from CLAs to other community-based settings and from congregate day services to employment services. He said that the transformation of DDS was needed for several reasons including the lessons learned from the COVID pandemic, the staffing crisis, advances in technology and how to maximize its

use, the ongoing issues with the waiting list, and developing new service models that are less costly but will help with sustainability of the services. ARPA dollars are a one-time funding source to be used over three years.

Mr. Mason detailed the DDS ARPA initiatives including (1) consolidating vacancies in group homes and redistribute the funding for individuals on the waiting list; (2) stabilizing with ARPA funding those qualified providers that are moving individuals between various types of services such as from day services to employment supports; (3) contracting with consultants to assist providers in developing transformation plans to move away from congregate settings into community-based settings; and (4) contracting with consultants on an outcome-based incentive payment program. Transformational change for DDS could entail a reduction of the number of group homes, or a redesign of group homes for individuals with behavioral health or medical needs, or an increase in alternative residential settings, or an increased use of assistive technology. DDS transformational change does not mean “no more group homes”, or closing all congregate day programs, or that there will not be a waiting list, or that staff will be replaced by assistive technology.

Expected outcomes from the ARPA initiatives include having 100 individuals moving from congregate residential settings into (1) residences funded through individualized home supports (IHS) waivers, (2) community companion homes, or (3) homes where the individual self-directs services. Another outcome would be for 200 individuals moving from congregate day programs to (1) individualized day services, (2) competitive employment, (3) transition services for competitive employment, and (4) self-direction for day services.

ARPA funding will be used for various financial incentives such as the “Move On Incentive”, which provides a funding incentive to a residential provider as individuals move out of CLAs and CRSs; the “Provider Transition Incentive”, which is monthly funding equal to the individuals funding who are moving out of the home until the home is closed; and the “New Placement Incentive” for providers which are providing new supports for individuals. Day program incentives include the “Provider Transition Incentive”, which gives the provider a payment to maintain services as individuals transition from the program; the “New Group Employment Placement Incentive”, which gives a receiving provider a payment of up to two times the hourly rate; and the “New Individual Employment Placement Incentive”, which gives a receiving provider an additional hourly rate for each individual.

Mr. Mason described the ARPA Advisory Committee structure that includes subcommittees on Residential Transformational Process, Day Transformational Process, Individual and Family Engagement, and DDS Engagement. He explained that part of the Advisory Committee’s focus is looking to improve communications. The committee has put out an RFP for a communications firm to develop a communications plan to more effectively and efficiently communicate the transformational process and goals of DDS. He went on to describe the status of hiring of staff for the ARPA initiatives and the other actions taken by the Advisory Committee.

Ms. Hlavac asked if guardians would be able to access the critical incident 255 form through the system? Mr. Mason responded that the ARPA initiative project was a matching piece to the critical incident process. Ms. Hlavac voiced her concern that sometimes an incident does not initially rise to the level of “critical” but then becomes critical and if the system would accommodate this type of incident. Mr. Mason said that there would be a process for this type of incident in the system. Ms. Hlavac then asked if group homes were being transformed into homes for individuals with more complex medical and behavioral health needs where would the staff training and expertise come from? Are the experts coming from DDS or outside the agency? Mr. Mason responded that it would be a combination of both depending on what the support needs are.

Ms. Benjamin asked about the universal assessment and Mr. Mason said that this assessment was very long and detailed in comparison to DDS’s Level of Need (LON) assessment. Ms. Benjamin cautioned Mr. Mason on the hiring of consultants based on her experience.

Rick Rothstein asked about collaboration between states on transformational process and systems so that the shared costs would be smaller? Mr. Mason explained that while collaboration on projects among state agencies was difficult and collaboration between states was even more so, DDS has worked through a national association (NASDDS) and found six states with a case management and assessment systems that could be models for what DDS could do with their case management and assessment systems. With ARPA funding, DDS can have a consultant review and research each of these state systems for what each has, and can DDS utilize that system. Mr. Rothstein asked about the transparency of the AARP Advisory Committee and its subcommittees and Mr. Mason responded that the ARPA Advisory Committee was setting up a webpage on the DDS website that would have minutes of meetings and recordings of all committee and subcommittee meetings. Mr. Rothstein asked what the incentives were for families to participate in these transformational changes. Mr. Mason cited the example of an individual who transitioned to lower cost services being able to recycle some of the savings into new services for that individual.

Mr. Zingler thanked Mr. Mason for his presentation.

Topics of Discussion

Mr. Zingler updated the Council on the proclamation honoring Beau Doherty, retired President of the Connecticut Special Olympics, and said that the request had been sent to the Governor's office.

Topics for future meetings

Mr. Zingler said that at the September Council meeting there would be a presentation on the DDS Medicaid program. He asked if there were other member suggestions for topics for future meetings. Ms. Benjamin said she would be interested in a presentation on abuse and neglect investigations. Christine Hainsworth-Straus said she would like to hear more about I-Dash and other supported living options. Ms. DonAroma said she would be interested in hearing about requirements and criteria for individuals to get an assistive technology assessment and use assistive technology.

Announcement of the next meeting

Thursday, September 15, 2022 at 4:30 p.m. via Microsoft Teams

Adjournment

A motion was made by Ms. Hlavac, seconded by Mr. Lenz to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:12 p.m.