

DDS North Region
Regional Advisory Council

May 20, 2020

Meeting Minutes – Video Meeting via TEAMS

Members Present: Richard Rothstein, Chair; Kathleen Tetreault, Vice Chair; Donna Clauson; Donna Cohen; Collette Bement Langner; Mary Lou O'Connor; Lori Sandora; Annette Scully; Elisa Velardo, DDS North Regional Director

Guests: Kim Little; Ellen Little; Hal Cohen; David Papia; Pat Stavola; Amber Burke (DDS); Ken Cabral (DDS)

Meeting was called to order at 5:10pm and began with introductions. Elisa asked people to share briefly how things have been going and how people are doing. Information was shared about how particular day program providers have been providing some services remotely, as well as some concerns regarding the limited amount of services.

Each member shared what has been happening, some with family members at home and providers contacting them virtually, others that are not at home have programs being provided at their residence. Some examples of services being provided such as crafts being dropped off, weekly Zoom meetings, Facetime contact with family, and other online programs have been helpful. There was some concern with limited provider contact and topics. There was also some concern about family members returning to their day programs after becoming very attached to being at home.

Elisa turned the meeting over to Amber Burke and Ken Cabral who were invited to join the meeting to talk about Day and Employment Services and what the future looks like and the plan going forward.

There has been funding that kept providers whole (they were to keep all staff), and they were to continue to check in with all family members which forced them to be creative and innovative about how they could continue to provide services. There has been a wide variety of how providers are doing that, as people have mentioned, being in-home, virtually, etc. Amber Burke has been working with providers on Employment Services going forward as people return to work. The second part is looking at planning for opening day programs. We want to move slowly and very planfully so it can be done safely. They have been gathering information about who will be returning (some may not want to return to how it was) and guidelines will be put together and a framework for providers will be provided to put a plan together on how they would return people to their congregate settings. Amber added that it has been very helpful to have providers involved in the planning process and how technology can be obtained and used. Many providers have already been thinking about how they would re-open with the new guidelines (social distancing, PPE, etc.) and considering things like what if someone cannot tolerate wearing a mask. They have received just over 1700 responses. Ken was asked if he could share the results of the survey, which he will do.

Collette Langner expressed concern with the program that her son attends which is a very large building that is not divided. It was stated that providers are working on how space can be re-configured, but it will have to be looked at with the guidelines. Transportation will also be an issue. There are currently no documents on specific guidelines; all of the CDC guidelines are still being gathered.

GSE and Individual Day programs would relate directly to the opening of the state. If the job opens and calls staff back, our individuals would also be able to go back.

It was asked if any programs were not planning to re-open due to losing staff. Both Ken and Elisa stated that they have not heard of any provider that is not willing to re-open and were appreciative of funding to allow them to continue to be viable and keep staff. It was again stated that it will be a gradual, slow, planful re-opening.

- Regional Director Updates:
 - Elisa reported that DDS has been tracking numbers and testing throughout the state. Reports are given daily. Currently the rate is at approximately 4%.

- DDS also tracks staff numbers; as of today, 101 staff have tested positive, which is also about 4%. 97 staff have recovered; 63 staff have returned to work.
- There has been good news on testing; at the beginning, wait times for results were 4-6 days which was very challenging. Rapid testing has now become available and results can be received within a day or two. There is also much more testing available for direct support staff. The rapid test site is located in New Haven and a certain number of tests have been set aside for staff. Beginning Tuesday, weekly testing can begin to be offered to direct support staff. We are also coordinating with private providers. This will be key for any plans for moving forward.
- Executive Order regarding limited operation of day camps and no residential overnight camps – DDS is working with Office for Early Childhood on all camp-related plans. Camp Q will open for 6 weeks for three 2-week sessions. The guidelines from the Association of Camps were also very helpful. Campers will not be picked up; family members will be bringing campers. Some of the guidelines being used for camp will also be used to help with planning for day programs.
- Hospital Admissions – DDS has been working with HHS and DPH regarding whether family members or staff can be with individuals that are admitted to the hospital. Guidance was issued at the beginning to providers that would allow a staff person to accompany the person. DDS has continued to work to provide guidance for all supported by DDS. This has now become a broader issue including others outside of DDS. Since hospitals are private, they each have their own guidelines. We can only offer guidance.
- Family Visits – an extension was recently issued on the ban on visits for all residential settings. This has been very difficult, and we know it has been very challenging for family members, however, we have been able to keep the numbers so low because of this decision by keeping the amount of exposure very limited. The Order has been expanded to allow for exploring other options, i.e. window visits, car to car visits, or outdoors with appropriate PPE. Providers have been encouraged to be creative to allow for some contact, but not inside the home. The primary concern is safety and how quickly the virus can be spread in congregate settings. Commissioner Scheff is on the re-opening committee and any changes will be gradual and incremental. We have also been working with NASDDS and other State agencies to move slowly and carefully. If things changed and anything happened, things would be pulled back.
- Medical Visits – some visits have been occurring remotely and some are beginning to be scheduled. People should be working individually with the provider.
- Elisa will share any information she receives, as well as the survey from Ken Cabral. There is also a lot of information on the DDS website.

There is no meeting scheduled for June, July, or August. The next meeting will be held on September 16th at 5:00pm.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Claudia Neumann
Executive Secretary