

DDS North Region
Regional Advisory Council

October 20, 2021

Meeting Minutes – Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Members Present: Kathleen Hayes, Chair; Annette Scully, Vice Chair; Donna Clauson; Kim Little; Rick Rothstein; Tammy Selinger; Elisa Velardo, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member)

Guests: Susan Lucek-Hughes

Meeting called to order at 5:02pm.

- Approval of Minutes – There was one request for an amendment to the minutes from the September 22, 2021 meeting. In the Regional Director Updates, the number of forums to be held should be 6, not 4 as written. A motion was made to approve the minutes with the amendment; motion seconded; minutes approved.
- Legislative Update –
 - Kevin Bronson has stated that all legislative updates will be made available to check on the DDS website; he will let us know when it goes live.
 - A change was made for the title of “health care worker” and who is included in that group. It will now include anyone in the health care field as opposed to only doctors.
 - Funding for ICF’s: may be a federal change; there was concern regarding a bill that was supposed to add funding to HCBS funding but not for ICF programs. The concern is that this would lessen the incentive for states to continue to run ICF programs. There are three national groups that are very involved; will keep watching. ICF’s are much needed due to the specialized needs of individuals with IDD.
 - Build Back Better Plan – we are hearing very little at this point; question of whether there would be cuts to ICF or if it would remain the same and additional funds would go to HCBS.
- Regional Director’s Update – Elisa Velardo
 - Vaccine Mandate – DDS and providers have been very focused on the mandate over the last several weeks. There were contingency plans, however, they have not been needed; compliance is very good. Weekly testing is ongoing and being entered into a tracking system. Originally, there were some technology glitches but those have been able to be resolved. Each provider is tracking in their own way so gathering information has been a challenge logistically. Testing is not an option for those in an ICF setting. With the staffing issues providers have been dealing with, this has been even more of a challenge. If staff had to be placed off duty, staffing has been even more difficult.
 - Boosters – more and more are becoming available. Boosters have not been mandated. Most people are going to community providers. Some clinics are also being held as options for those who have difficulty with vaccinations and need more specialized support. Staff from Hartford Healthcare and Windham Hospital have been very helpful and supportive.
 - Forums – As of the last meeting, there were two forums held; 18 forums were held statewide. Family members, providers, and DDS staff all participated. Josh Scalora from Central Office and his team will now be combining all the information discussed from all the forums, including themes collected by the Life Course Ambassadors who were in attendance at all of the forums. Some of the themes were transportation, funding, flexibility between programs, and housing.
 - An email will be sent from the Commissioner with a link for people that did not attend for anyone that would like to share any thoughts or concerns; please pass on to others.
 - A Notice of Opportunity (NOO) was issued for a Remote Supports Pilot Program. There was a very good response; 18 providers statewide attended the informational session that was held. Remote Supports was added as a waiver service in 2019, however, no one is using it as a waiver service currently.

We are looking for at least one agency per Region and it would include a minimum of two people who are already receiving IHS services; maximum of 10 that will participate. The agency will identify the individuals. Elisa shared the definitions and timeline; it would be up and running by February.

- Other topics:
 - Communications Discussion:
 - Concern was raised from members regarding the way that things are communicated to families and that things are not reaching them; some were not aware of when the forums were being held. Most information is only received if someone shares on Facebook.
 - Website discussion/suggestions:
 - The site seems too busy; too many colors
 - It needs to be more user friendly for families and individuals that may not be proficient with technology
 - Needs to be easier to navigate for families
 - Is it ADA accessible?
 - It is not clear where to locate specific items, under what category; search does not provide help
 - Elisa will invite Kevin Bronson to attend the January meeting to discuss further.
 - An update was shared regarding the Step-down Unit. The capacity is for 5 individuals; for people who do not need inpatient hospital care but cannot return home. When someone transfers out, the Regional Directors from each region meet monthly to review needs of others that may be referred. Individuals have responded very well to the services provided at the SD unit. Services include all clinical services such as Psychology, OT, PT, and nursing.
 - RMS Branches program in Meriden – The North Region is the lead, however, referrals are made from all three regions. The referrals are sent to Elisa or Stacie Silva-Gordon and then they are referred to the agency. Individuals who are referred are those that are in need of emergency transitional housing. This program does not have the clinical support that the Step-down Unit does. There is a capacity for three individuals. People are transitioned in and stabilized and then they transition out. The stays are generally shorter than at the Step-down. People have successfully transitioned out and have not had to return which is the goal. Elisa will share more data at the January meeting. The program opened in January 2020. There is definitely a need, so would like to have more programs available.
 - Age-out Services – It was asked if people were still able to receive services with the staffing shortages. The staffing shortage is a global issue and it is impacting all services including for people that are aging out, as well as those self-directing and provider agencies. It has been particularly impactful on day programs. It is definitely a concern, and meetings have been occurring more frequently.
 - Allied Update – An update was shared regarding concerns that were raised at the last meeting. Calls are now getting through, however, the process is still taking too long for a response and it is still very inefficient.

A motion for adjournment was made and seconded. Meeting adjourned.

The next meeting will be the annual joint meeting with all three regional Councils and the Council on Developmental Services. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 17, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Claudia Neumann

Executive Secretary