



State of Connecticut  
Department of Developmental Services

**DDS**

Jordan A. Scheff  
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo  
Deputy Commissioner

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)  
Meeting Minutes  
September 20, 2023  
via TEAMS**

**Attendees:** Lynn Arezzeni, Carol Cooney, Ashley Dennis, Amy French, Kathryn Haaland, Nancy Kalal, Kathryn (Kat) Kimball, Diane Martin, Cres Secchiaroli-Regional Director, Noreen Hills-Executive Secretary

**Absent:** Erin McGuire, Haley Parent

**Guest Attendees:** Kathryn Caristo-Scalora-DDSDR Director of Quality Assurance, Heidi Earle, Rachel Keesler-CTFSN, Lisa Nee, Adrianna Ramirez-CTFSN

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Lynn Arezzini, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:03p. The members and guests introduced themselves and gave a brief background about themselves.

**Approval of June 2023 Minutes:**

Carol Cooney made a motion and Kate Haaland seconded to approve the minutes from the June 14, 2023 SR RAC meeting. New members Ashley Dennis, Amy French and Kat Kimball abstained from the vote. All in favor, motion passed.

**Citizens Comments:**

Lisa Nee stated that she is dismayed by the House Bill 5001 regarding the transition comments within the bill about the life skills college. Regional Director (RD) Secchiaroli explained that the bill calls for DDS to submit feasibility study for a transition academy, which is to be submitted by January 2025. The committee hasn't started meeting although they will be working on the details and the study. If any RAC member would like to be more involved, RD Secchiaroli stated that he will submit your name(s) to be a part of the committee.

**Regional Director Update:**

Director of Quality Assurance – RD Secchiaroli explained that each region has hired a Director of Quality Assurance and they have been working together to learn their new positions and to review

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trends in their respective regions. RD Secchiaroli introduced Kathryn (Kate) Caristo-Scalora to the members.

Kate thanked everyone for allowing her to attend the meeting and introduce herself. She joined DDS two (2) years ago. Her previous role was working in the Quality and Compliance division working with DDS, DHMAS and various insurance companies.

Kate's personal philosophy of quality is assuring that services that the individuals we support are safe, are fulfilling their goals and are happy. She will align quality with the DDS Mission, People First language, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, DDS policies and procedures, as well as the state statutes and regulations. Kate has four (4) objectives for her position:

1. Services that are being provided to ensure they meet the quality of standards, which includes NCI survey for individuals, Quality Service Reviews and licensing. Kate will review South Region data for trends on what can be improved.
  - a. There were a lot of questions asked regarding the NCI survey and who is interviewed. NCI is a survey that is conducted with highly trained surveyors who work closely with the individuals served by DDS as well their families (not the agency that they attend) to answer the survey questions to the best of their ability. The samplings are done by a random sample pool. Two (2) of the questions on the survey are specific for only the individual to answer. If the individual is nonverbal, the surveyor takes facial expressions, sign language, gestures, assistive technology, etc. into consideration. An individual is not excluded from the survey if they are nonverbal.
2. Quality in policies and procedures to reflect the supports and standard of excellence.
3. Education by partnering with a Self-Advocate Coordinator to set up informational sessions to discuss trends and goals.
4. Planning with emergency management and safety to ensure that the individuals we support are able to be prepared in case of a major emergency.

Kate Haaland added that she feels that there are very limited services in southeastern Connecticut. DDS needs to look at the quality of life outcome as well as safety.

Kate added that quality impacts everything, including employment, transportation and safety. Her position is new and will have many different layers with different data and information. She will be working on identifying trends and how they can be improved.

Amy French asked how they can find out about other services/events within their area. RD Secchiaroli suggested to contact her case manager.

DDS Website – The state is in the process of updating the website. Once that happens, please let us know if you see anything that should be updated.

Quality Assurance – RD Secchiaroli shared a Data Warehouse document from DDS's website to explain that Quality Assurance will not just be looking at safety but will be looking at several areas.

RAC Members – We have a full RAC according to state statute and bylaws of 10 members.

**Staffing** – The Governor has developed a Workforce Council to help with staffing issues statewide, across all sectors/agencies. DDS has hired, Mary Pat DeCarlo, as the DDS representative to the Governor’s council. She will start meeting with the council and stakeholder groups. Mary Pat has an extensive background with private providers and advocacy groups. We are working hard on how to address the staffing issues. Updates regarding the council will be shared at future meetings. Lynn Arezzini would like to be part of the Workforce Council.

**Bill 5001** – DDS received new funding to specifically target individuals on the Wait List whose primary caregiver is over the age of 65. The prior initiatives that targeted enhanced family services, elderly caregivers and underserved were used with current funds.

**Guardianship Questions** – We are arranging to have one of DDS’s attorneys attend a future RAC meeting to answer some of the guardianship questions that you have.

**SAC** – A Self Advocate Coordinator (SAC) is an individual who receives services through DDS and has been hired as a state employee. SACs hold meetings and trainings for other individuals to help them advocate for themselves, participate on the council and Commissioner meetings, etc. DDS will be having four (4) SACs per region, who will be reporting to directors on EMT.

**Kate Haaland** wanted to express that she just found out that within her son’s self-direct budget there are funds for repairs/replacements. She would like other families to understand that they may have these types of options as well. RD Secchiaroli explained that Self Determination is one of the core functions in the STEP initiatives that we are working on promoting. DDS has created videos and started outreach.

**Children’s Services** – DDS is developing a Children’s Services division to support children beyond the BSP program.

**Assistive Technology** – DDS has hired a Director of Assistive Technology and staff who can assess individuals with assistive technology needs. There is also some funding available that may help to purchase some of the equipment.

**Guardian Payments** – A bill has passed that allows guardians to be paid for certain services they provide to the individuals in their care. DDS is working on the plan and regulations with internal meetings. It is still in its infancy, but once it is ready to submit for approval, it will be published for public comment. RD Secchiaroli will send info to the RAC members once it has been completed and approved.

**Officer Elections:**

Officer terms are for one (1) year. The Council needs to elect a new set of officers during this meeting. The following nominations were presented:

**Chair** – Carol Cooney made a motion to nominate **Lynn Arezzini** as Chair, Ashley Dennis seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

**Vice Chair** – Lynn Arezzini made a motion to nominate **Kathryn Haaland** as Vice Chair, Carol Cooney seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

**Secretary** – Ashley Dennis made a motion to nominate **Carol Cooney** as Secretary, Lynn Arezzini seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

**Council Vacancies:**

All member vacancies are filled. Membership consists of family members of individuals eligible for services from the Department, a member designed by the ARC as well as an individual who is eligible to receive services from the Department. We will be tracking absences for the council to review if necessary.

**2024 RAC Meeting Schedule:**

Lynn Arezzini suggested to add an additional meeting on October 18, 2023 and the council members agreed. Lynn made a motion to add a SR RAC meeting on October 18, 2023, and Carol Cooney seconded. All in favor, motion passed. Lynn will follow up with the Guilford Free Library for a meeting space.

It was decided to table the discussion regarding the 2024 schedule for the SR RAC meetings.

**New Business:**

The following agenda items will be added to the October 2023 agenda, under New Business:

- Assistive Technology
- Employment Forum
- Cluster Homes

**Adjournment:**

Lynn Arezzini made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:03p and Carol Cooney seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:  
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