

**DSS Autism Spectrum Disorder Advisory Council (ASDAC)**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**November 18, 2020**

**Members Present:** Jennifer Abbatemarco, Representative Catherine Abercrombie, Marcia Eckerd, Melissa Gagne, Ann Gionet, Bill Halsey, Julie McKenna representing Mickey Kramer, Andrew Komarow, Jim Loomis, Maureen Woronecki representing Kathy Marchione, Alice Ridgway representing Office of Early Childhood, Donyale Pina, Yana Razumnaya, Lynn Ricci, Josh Scalora representing DDS, Lois Rosenwald, Carole Ryan-Hanlon, Kari Sassu, Doriana Vicedomini,

**Members Absent:** Jill Caron, Judy Dowd, Bryan Klimkiewicz, Disability Rights of Connecticut/designee, Jimnahs Miller, Julie Wolf

**Others:** Amy Dumont, Elizabeth Thomas, Phil Ober, Jennifer Krom, Dawn Lambert, Steve Dilella

**Call to Order:** 10:04am

**Welcome and Roll Call**

**Review and Approval of September 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes:** Bill Halsey made motion and seconded by Marcia Eckerd

**DSS Call Center Wait Times:** Yana advised that she was placed on hold for over 2 1/2 hours which is a concern. Amy Dumont invited DSS leadership from the Benefits Center to address the issues, Phil Ober and Elizabeth Thomas to discuss and address issues. Estimate of mid-December to be fully virtual. Bill requested printout of plan.

Phil Ober, Director of the Benefits Center at the Department of Social Services addressed Council. In 2018 the average call wait times was 108 minutes. Changes were implemented and the average wait time in 2019 and 2020 was 15 minutes pre pandemic. Once the Covid pandemic began it was decided to implement technology. 85% of the Benefit Centers employees began working virtually, which was a big stretch of technology. Technology factors play a significant role and IT has been working strenuously to improve the increased wait times. On average, 26,000 people per month are seen in the service centers and re now required to call in. Also, there has been a high volume of applications because many people have lost their jobs and were receiving stimulus money and once that stopped financial situations changed. The Benefits Center is not a call center, they consist of Eligibility workers. Challenges include renewals and the storm that took place,

implementing new system remotely. Virtual Hold, a new call back feature, is being worked on which they are finding good results. Agreement with Safe Link to save cell phone minutes. Goal is to answer calls as soon as they come in.

Rough estimate for virtual hold to be statewide by mid-December. Phil will provide printout to Bill and Amy. They are also working on an Email blast to provide information.

Current average wait time is 1 hour. Virtual hold changes daily based on volume of calls, typically call back is an hour.

Phone disconnection was an issue, but this has been addressed and worked on. Providing client ID number is important as it generates a screen pop which provides the client's information.

**Housing Discussion:** Steve DiLella, Dawn Lambert, Josh Scalora

Steve DiLella: 25 years or so ago housing programs housing for the disabled began. Previous to that housing was just based on affordability, not disability specific. As increases in homelessness across the state in the 80s and 90s it was decided to determine what options would be best. It was decided that the best option for individuals who are homeless and with a disability would provide an intervention called Permanent Housing Subsidy, much like a Section 8 or state rental assistance program voucher with permanent case management from an agency that has specialty in the goal of that case management is to ensure that the individual's housing is maintained. This focuses on things like making sure that the tenant pays the rent on time and are a good tenant. An important role of the Case Managers is to connect the individual to services that they need in the community, whether that is mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, physical health care or making sure connections are there. For about 10-15 years this program has expanded to create in excess of 25—units specifically for the homeless population with disabilities. The program has been a success showing stability. Over 90% of individuals served stayed over a year.

Current housing options in place were discussed

Rapid Rehousing (temporary housing)

IDASH Model

Community First Choice

Steve will look into Fair Housing.

Josh Scalora, DDS: DDS started as an institutional care model and as people move out of institutions, they moved into group homes in the community, typically into a group home of DDS center. Currently most individuals live in group homes and most receive residential supports from DDS. Some live with family and receive supports.

DDS was asked to join the Interagency Committee on Supportive Housing and Homeless. This group brought DDS into the fold and we learned quite a bit about supportive housing and housing development and are still learning. There may be opportunities for individuals with autism.

DDS has moved institutional care or group home model into more of the community-based supports model as they believe that people are best supported in their community.

Costs of services is a concern as there is limited supply of fiscal resources to meet everyone's needs.

Goal is to rebalance our system to take what we already have and moved individuals who want to live more independently from those group homes into safe, affordable supportive housing.

IDASH: large investment in proving the concept that this could work for DDS and then ongoing with the low-income housing tax credit developments. Looking to provide housing for 10-15 people. Goal of this program is to develop a partnership between the provider and the developer and the property manager with the overall success of those supported individuals in mind. With the initial funding that was granted, we were able to get a projected 47 individuals supported across 3 different developments. It is discussed about funding mechanisms which is important for the developers. Developers request low income tax credits based on number of criteria.

Dawn Lambert: Have learned a lot in the last 20 years about housing vouchers, specifically for Money Follows the Person. Subsidized housing, 30% of SSI, 30% of SSD I, 30% of individual's income. Wraparound services are integrated into the housing. Discussion of Community First Choice.

Discussion of the importance of community based supportive housing, more options and next steps. RFP

Interest was expressed in starting a Housing Sub-Committee. Rep. Abercrombie Council suggested Council send emails to Lisa Bonetti with interests in joining housing sub-committee. Not a short-term project, can be a year in the making. Long term initiative. Agencies should decide who they would like on the committee, need patience during this time with covid.

**To Do:**

- Initiate Housing Sub-Committee
- Bill will draft potential pathways to pursue to move project forward
- Look into how Council would like to spend dollars. Will housing be the specific focus point for this year?

**Adjournment: 12:07**

Next Meeting: **Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 10:00am**