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Department of Developmental Services

South Region



Elisa Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

Thomas A. Dailey
South Region Director

Department of Developmental Services (DDS)
South Region (SR) Regional Advisory and Planning Council (RAC)
Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2022 - 6:00 p.m.
Guilford Free Library/MS Teams

Members Present:

Leslie Bridges-Parent, Chair; Lynne Arezzini, Vice-Chair; Carol Cooney, Secretary; Dawn DeMatteo; Heidi Earle; Gregory McMahon, DDS Assistant Regional Director IFS Division; Kathleen Calo, Assistant Regional Director Private Admin Services Director, Gunnar Abrahamsson, Secretary.

Public Participation:

Twila Skelly

Discussion:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Leslie Bridges-Parent at approximately 6:06pm. There were brief introductions of RAC members, DDS Staff, and public participants.

Twila Skelly began by expressing her support and appreciation for DDS and its efforts to support providers and their staff, especially during the difficult times providers are facing with the staffing shortages. She expressed concerns about how turnover may impact the continuity of care for her daughter. Council Member DeMatteo expanded on this topic to illustrate how concerned she and others are about the staffing shortages and retention.

It was mentioned by the council members that this staffing and retention issue is not unique to one provider but is an issue across the board and throughout the country.

The discussion moved into updates from DDS and the Assistant Regional Directors (ARDs).

ARD Greg McMahon updated the group that himself and Regional Director Thomas Dailey have effectively retired but have returned as Temporary Worker Retirees (TWRs) and will be executing the responsibilities of their roles until they are filled. ARD McMahon informed the group that his vacant position as ARD has been filled by Brian Smith, who is transferring over from DDS West Region.

ARD McMahon outlined more of what his responsibilities are as a TWR, informing the group about his work on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), and outlining that much of the efforts in this area will be to stabilize the agency and mitigate staffing issues statewide while expanding assistive technology.

Council Member DeMatteo asked if former Deputy Commissioner, current TWR, Peter Mason could attend the next SR RAC meeting to further inform the group about the objectives and timeline of the ARPA project, to which many of the council members expressed support for.

There was some discussion around formerly state operated group homes that were privatized and subsequently are being operated by private agencies. Council members expressed concern for how widely benefits and salaries differ within state operated group homes and those run by private non-profit agencies.

ARD McMahon began discussion on the “slow-opening” of the 24-hour respite center in Meriden. The respite center will be opening statewide on July 1. Currently respite centers are running at 50% capacity for the short term due to rooms being shared and precautions being taken by DDS to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

DDS following CDC guidelines and is consulting with DDS Nursing and Medical Staff to reach 100% capacity as safely as possible.

ARD Calo reiterated DDS’s commitment to work and support agencies to bolster recruitment and retention of staff members. ARD Calo also illustrated concerns surrounding clinical operations, particularly nursing, which has also experienced heavy loss of staff during the last 2 years.

ARD Calo outlined a DDS collaboration with the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS) for a New Haven home that serves individuals who suffer from intellectual disabilities as well as mental health and addiction issues. This project is currently in the planning stages.

ARD Calo began discussing the various models of services opening on the Meriden Campus and the agencies that are participating. A Medical Model and Transitional Housing Unit (TU) are currently in the early stages of opening on the Campus and will be supported by a number of different agencies.

ARD McMahon informed the group about the opening of a New Emergency Transition Housing Program (ETHP) that opened in Wilton on May 26th. This is in addition to the existing ETHP Run by RMS in Meriden.

The council moved on to discuss legislative updates. Secretary Abrahamsson informed the council that Kevin Bronson, Executive & Legislative Affairs Director, had put together an outline of bills concerning DDS that had passed and “died” in this year’s legislative session. Secretary Abrahamsson informed the council that he would email the council this document.

The March meeting minutes were voted on and unanimously approved at approximately 6:57pm.

The meeting adjourned at 7:01pm.

Next meeting June 15, 6:00 p.m. at the Guilford Free Library, 67 Park Street.