

DDS North Region Regional Advisory Council

September 17, 2025

Meeting Minutes – Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Members Present: Kim Little, Chair; Janice Favreau, Shannon Klenk, Ellyn Little; Sue Prihar; Adrianna Ramirez, Stacie Silva, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member)

Others Present: Davina King, Melissa Mills – CTFSN, Rachel K.

Guests: Mary Patricia De-Carlo, DDS Director of Workforce Strategies
Dawn Frey-Caron, Assistant Regional Director Private Division
Davina King
Melissa Mills - CTFSN

Call To Order

Kim Little called the meeting to order at 5:03 pm.

Approval of Minutes – May 21, 2025

Motion to accept the Minutes of the May 21, 2025 RAC meeting.

The motion was made by Ms. Janice Favreau and seconded by Ms. Shannon Klenk.

The motion carried unanimously.

Presentations:

Mary Patricia De-Carlo-Workforce Strategies Update

Ms. Mary Patricia DeCarlo provided the following update on the current workforce crisis:

- DDS launched a Direct Support Professionals (DSP) marketing campaign in April 2025.
- Displayed on television, radio, billboards, and social media.
- Delivered in four languages.
- A film was developed as part of the campaign, using images of real individuals and DSP's.
- DDS also developed a job board for private providers to post their jobs openings.
- Since April, over 300 jobs are posted; 107 providers are participating.
- DDS did a quick survey of those that are using the job board as well as other providers and 30% of the providers responded, 71% of that group found that using the job portal was easy, but unfortunately, the overall outcome of the job board was not as promising. It was about 84% that reported that they did not see any uptake in their hiring or number of applications.
- This marketing campaign was originally made possible with ARPA funding, and to bring it back, new funding sources need to be identified.
- DDS continues to manage the job board and it's accessible to everyone.

Ms. DeCarlo also reported that she continues to work with the Office of Workforce Strategies and recommending implementing **standardized training** for Direct Care Workers. They are in conversation with the CT Community Colleges and working with them to develop and maybe even teach the curriculum through the colleges.

- Direct workers include DSPs, Patient Care Assistants (PCA), Home Health Aides, Companions, possibly leading to Certified Nurse Assistants (CAN) as these are all the entry level of direct care work.
- This training will include introduction to the different disabilities; introduction to mental health; first aid; HIPAA; abuse and neglect, sexual harassment, workforce violence; CPR in first aid; safety and emergency procedures. Also, crisis management which is de-escalation and following positive behavioral techniques; proper documentation and communication skills, proper nutrition and feeding guidelines.
- It's probably going to be an 80-hour training.
- The program will initially begin as a non-certified offering, with the long-term goal of developing it into a certification program.

DDS waivers require that anyone working with individuals must be at least 18 years old. Therefore, they talked about starting with vocational-technical schools to introduce students to this type of work. Ms. DeCarlo will be meeting with the head of the technical schools so that it can be part of the curriculum and by the time students graduate, they could step right into a job.

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Ms. Janice Favreau stated that this is sort of a way to standardize across the board training for all people who are providing these services. She asked Ms. DeCarlo to explain how that works. Ms. DeCarlo explained that her job involves dealing with workforce issues in CT, mostly for the private sector; to find out what was happening on a state level for workforce development. She explained that the Office of Workforce Strategies felt that the Direct Care Workers or Direct Support Professionals was being covered under health care and human services. However, it is clearly different. Ultimately, they realized that they need to help the private sector regarding the DSP's, and that is one of her focuses. But on the other side to get the assistance from the Office of Workforce Strategies, they were opening it up to all direct care positions. This comes from a Public Act that was signed into law back in 2023 where they had to research Human Services Career Pipeline and training and what the cost would be to provide those.

Janice Favreau expressed that it's an excellent idea what Ms. DeCarlo is trying to do with both community colleges and the technical schools. She asked if it goes into the community colleges, is this something that the individual would have to pay for it like they do with a CNA Certification or would this be subsidized under state income guidelines. Ms. DeCarlo responded that they are hoping that it will be subsidized for some people. Presently there are programs through the community colleges where SNAP will pay for the training. That's one of the avenues that they are looking at, and they are also considering that possibly providers themselves may pay for people to go through this training because it would be more cost effective than them doing it themselves. Providers spend a great deal of money on recruitment, training of staff, and then they turn around and they lose them, so they are looking at the different resources for the funding.

Davina King stated that this was her first meeting and explained that she's a nurse by background and have a child with special needs. She's been utilizing a lot of students from the University of Connecticut (UCONN) because she lives nearby. She explained that she was on a alumni call with freshman nursing students, and they asked specifically about what Ms. DeCarlo was talking about the workforce. They said that they don't get into clinical practice until their junior year in college and they were asking is there any program where people could be trained as PCA's to help with children like her son and be able to learn more about it. She expressed that UCONN said that they would be happy to help and facilitate that if we wanted to do anything in terms of the program development with the student nurses. Ms. DeCarlo will reach out to Ms. King and touch base with her to get more information and make that connection at UCONN. Ms. Adriana Ramirez shared in the chat the Academy for Human Service Training link (<https://www.marrakechinc.org/academy-for-human-service-training/>). In the chat she explained that DDS held a webinar with Rewarding Work CT last week and shared the link to the recording (<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmH1CUIb26naxhEHZpNp9kkJWeQvFtifM&si=-wR6Szh0sMp5qdR7>).

Dawn Frey-Caron – DDS RFP Update

Ms. Dawn Frey-Caron presented the following updates on the DDS RFP:

- In April 2025, DDS requested proposals for ten (10) group homes; 3 group homes per region and 1 medical model home that would be dedicated to medically fragile individuals who require tracheotomy care.
- There was not a lot of traction back in April; the West Region and the North Region received one proposal for one group home but not for the rest.
- There were some variables there as to why DDS didn't get proposals; one due to the new rates as of July 1st and two due to the pending strike with some of the private providers.
- As no proposals were received during the initial posting, the RFP was revised and reissued on August 22nd. This time the RFP was posted individually by region.
- In the North Region the RFP was posted to seek (2)-4 bed CLAs and one medical model home. The other two DDS regions posted their separate RFP's as well.
- The North Region received 8 letters of interest.
- A proposer's conference was held to review the project and address inquiries. At that conference, they talked about the timeline and discussed a brief synopsis of the individuals that have been identified for these homes. They also gathered questions from interested parties. All questions will be addressed, and responses will be posted.
- The deadline to submit a proposal is October 24, 2025.

Sue Prihar expressed that she's super excited about everything that's happened so far. She also expressed that DDS have dozens of beds right now for people who aren't high level of need. She explained that her son has been looking to transfer for years, and nobody wants him because he's a high level of need. Ms. Prihar asked if the proposed CLA's are going to be for people who have higher level of needs. Ms. Frey-Caron responded that most of the individuals that have been identified have significant behavioral support needs, LON 7 and 8 and several individuals require 1:1 supports. They have been outlined and identified in each of the RFPs, so the providers know who the individuals are. Regarding the medical model home, the individuals require 24-hour nursing supports, including oversight of respiratory therapy. These individuals have been identified as well. Ms. Stacie Silva addressed that the proposed CLA's is for individuals

aging out of residential schools. Ms. Prihar asked what about for the kids who are just not well placed right now. Ms. Silva responded that they are still working on that and with providers.

Regional Director's Update

Stacie Silva Regional Director, thanked Ms. MaryPat and Dawn Frey-Caron for the information that they shared this evening. Director, Stacie Silva, provided an update on the following key organizational matters:

Hiring Freeze: at the last RAC meeting, it was shared that OPM did not allow DDS to proceed with hiring due to a hiring freeze. DDS had many vacant positions in the North Region. Since then, the following positions has been filled:

- PRAT Manager: Susan Klemm is the new PRAT Manager. She was previously a Case Manager Supervisor in the South Region for several years.
- Secretary 2-PRAT: Tashy Cowan will be starting October 3rd.
- Abuse and Neglect Liaison: Latoya Garafalo is the Abuse and Neglect Liaison for the North Region. Ms. Garafalo started in August.
- Case Manager Supervisor (Putnam): Mallory Moreau filled that position and started in August.
- Interviews have been taking place to fill the direct care workers vacant positions. Over the past couple of weeks, OPM has open the door for DDS to be able to do that. DDS is looking forward to filling those positions.

On September 6th, DDS was able to host their first **Unified BBQ contest** at Camp Harkness. It was an amazing event, said Ms. Silva and explained that there were 13 unified teams that competed. It was a real competition, there was a team from Southbury Training School, one team from the Hartford Regional Center, 3 teams from Public group homes and 3 teams from private providers. Also, there was 3 teams that came from a family. They had 8 judges, only one perfect score of 200. Families came from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania to watch and participate in the event. The individuals who came out to participate were very excited to be part of such an event. This was a well put together event by the South Region Regional Director. Ms. Silva encourages all to just come out next year and be a part of it all.

Direct Support Professional recognition was last week, and the DDS management staff put together some light refreshments and some small bags for appreciation for our direct care staff in the region. Also, the Governor provided a proclamation to the whole department for us to share statewide.

This past summer the DDS Community Companion Homes (**CCH**) hosted their **Chilling and Grilling** event at Northwest Park in Manchester, for their licensees and the individuals that they serve. It offered CCH participants an opportunity to come together, share good food, music, dancing and networking.

The North Region will be hosting an open house on September 18th for the **Mason House** which is a transition house that is named after the previous DDS Deputy Commissioner, Peter Mason. This house is supported by Mid State ARC and it's located in Bristol, CT. The house from outside looks like a regular house, but it has five apartments within the house. Individuals have moved from group homes or their own families' homes into this house. They all have their individual separate apartment units within this house and it's to help them to develop skills in order to eventually move into their own apartment, and they're able to live in this unit for only two years. Two years is the maximum limit that they can live in this environment and hopefully they're successful to build the skills to move into their own apartment. Ms. Silva explained that she took tour of it, and it was just amazing. The set up that they had. She shared that one of the young ladies was showing her how she uses the assistive technology. The only common area that they must use was the laundry room and basement. Everyone had their own porch that goes outside. The one door that you go into had a common hallway and everyone had their own door in the hallway to go into their apartment.

Ms. Janice Favreau asked what happens to those individuals after they complete the 2-year transition program. Where do they go? Ms. Silva responded that they could go back to their previous home setting or obtain their own apartment. Ms. Favreau asked if DDS has identified providers that are offering supportive apartments. Ms. Silva responded that they have providers that have developments in what is called supportive housing with staff. She explained that on the DDS website on Tuesday Forum there's more information about those settings on supportive housing. She can also bring someone to the next RAC meeting to talk about supporting housing. She can also invite the Self-Advocates come in and share information and their success stories. Ms. Adriana shared in the chat the map of Supportive Housing as of April 2025 (Exhibit A - <https://portal.ct.gov/dds/-/media/dds/housing/sh-map.pdf?rev=c979a391d9524c6c9279d2395646f691&hash=C140569E696B5E1C49474CA1F5E5E09B>) and the DDS Supportive Housing page (Exhibit B - https://portal.ct.gov/dds/searchable-archive/step/supportive-housing?language=en_US).

Fourth Tuesday Forum: Stacie Silva encouraged people to tune in to the 4th Tuesday Forums. The next one is on smart living spaces and assistive technology.

RAC Bylaws: Kevin Bronson from DDS Communications Department will be joining the next RAC meeting to discuss the bylaws. The Committee will hold elections in December for its leadership positions. At that time, Kim Little, Chairman intends to step down and will not seek reappointment as Chairman.

Strikes: DDS recently received four strike notices from four different agencies. DDS has two weeks to plan for it and hoping that they don't go into strike action.

Legislative: No update.

Public Participation:

Ms. Janice Favreau expressed concern about staffing particularly in the house that her son Christopher is in which is a medically involved house. She explained that there's a lot of mandated shifts and she's concerned about people being tired. She's hoping that they get some staffing for that house. She explained that she had a recent meeting with Mr. Bernard McNair and nothing yet has been down to hire for that house. She expressed she's concerned about that because staff are getting burned out and they don't provide the best care, and they are tired and short tempered. She appreciates the workforce strategy work that needs to be done for the private providers and it's an excellent idea and offers opportunities for people who might want to look at that as a career, but she asked not to forget about the DDS public homes that require a higher level of care due to so many medical issues. Ms. Silva responded that DDS had interviews last week to fill some of those vacant positions; they are still trying to fill more positions. She also explained that she's been working with Bernard McNair and Melanie Korzon about doing cross training; having staff at least trained in one or two additional homes specially because of the holidays.

Adrianna Ramirez with CT Family Support Network explained that included in the DDS newsletter is their flyer of events for support groups and play groups and workshops that are happening for September. They also share on their Facebook page and through their own e-mail list. She shared that they have support groups and one-on-one family support coordinators that helps support with questions.

Janice Favreau expressed that in regards about bringing people in to speak, she asked if there's a way that RAC can provide a forum for local state legislators who have expressed their interest in the public health care to join and talk so that the committee could actually see who they are, hear a little bit about them and when they are asked to advocate they have a better idea of who they are communicating with. Ms. Silva responded that Kevin Bronson and Jill O'Connor are the connection to the state legislators. These thoughts can be share next month with Kevin Bronson. Ms. Tammy Selinger stated that another way to get in touch with the legislators is by going to their local town halls; that's the place where you can meet them and talk with them and take the opportunity to raise your concerns. Ms. Favreau also asked for more DDS source of information so that she could have current data and information. Ms. Silva responded that on the DDS website they have the Management Information Report (MRI) that is published quarterly, and it provides DDS staff and stakeholders with information and statistics. Ms. Adriana Ramirez shared in the chat copy of the March 2025 MIR (see Exhibit C).

No further comments or questions at this time.

Motion to adjourn at 6:28 pm.

The motion was made by Tammy Selinger and seconded by Sue Prihar.

The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Ether Diaz

Executive Secretary