



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Ned Lamont
Governor

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

**Developmental Services Council
February 15, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

Location: Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

In attendance: Adrienne Benjamin, Fredrick Lenz Jr., Diana Mennone, Pamela DonAroma, Brian Dillon, Patti Silva, Christine Hainsworth-Straus, Lisa Weisinger-Roland, Kevin Zingler, Damion Williams, Michael Beloff, Adrianna Ramirez, Nicole Milo

Members of the Public: None

Absent: Kelly Dorsey

DDS Staff:

Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner
Elisa Velardo, Deputy Commissioner
Kevin Bronson, DDS Director of Communications, Legislation, and Regulations
Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson
Jill Kennedy, DDS Legislative Liaison
Wesaneit Tsegai, Executive Secretary
Amber Carter, DDS Director of Employment and Day Services
Trevor Rogers, Education Services Specialist, Central Office
Catherine DeStefano, Education Services Specialist, West Region
Darrell Spears, Education Services Specialist, North Region

Introductions

Chairperson Silva called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM and noted that the threshold for a quorum was met.

Opportunity for Public Participation

Chairperson Silva next asked if there were any members of the public who were interested in addressing the Council under the "Public Participation" section of the agenda. Members of the public are allotted three minutes to do so.

There were no members of the public who spoke.

Dialogue

Chairperson Silva moved on to the introduction of new members Adrianna Ramirez, and Nicole Milo.

Councilmember Nicole Milo shared her story as a parent advocate and navigating services and the education system with her eldest child. She expressed her excitement at joining the council with the work they have done.

Councilmember Adrianna Ramirez introduced herself and shared her experience as an advocate both professionally and personally. She shared that from a young age she would assist family members both as a translator and a medical advocate. She is also the Executive Director of Connecticut Family Support Network. She looks forward to sharing concerns of English and Spanish-speaking members of the community.

Chairperson Silva next brought up the approval of past minutes. She shared that December minutes will be voted on at the next meeting and shared some edits to the January Minutes.

Chairperson Silva next moved on to introduce the Deputy Commissioner, who joined with the DDS Employment and Day Services team to present some information to the council.

❖ Elisa Velardo, Deputy Commissioner: *Remarks*

❖ Amber Carter

- Introduction of EDS Team and Interactive Presentation-Miss Carter introduced members of the team before moving on to the presentation on Employment and Day Services.
- Carter shares that with so many acronyms used by DDS there is a resource document available on the DDS website sharing the meanings of the acronyms commonly used by DDS.
- She went on to provide an overview of the various day services available through DDS:
 - Day Services
 - Group Day Supports (DSO)
 - Senior Supports
 - Individualized Day Supports (IDS) Vocational
 - Non-Vocational
 - Pre-Employment
 - Employment Transition Services (ETS)
 - Project SEARCH
 - Employment
 - Individualized Supported Employment (ISE)
 - Customized Employment (CE)
 - Group Supported Employment (GSE)
 - Self-Employment Options
- Carter then shared information regarding upcoming projects
 - Project Search: Notice of Opportunity, hoping to award up to four new project search host sites.
 - Innovative Employment Opportunity (IEO) Notice of Opportunity 2024
 - Funding changes for Employment Transition Services (ETS)
 - Additional funding may be requested for Individualized Day Vocational (IDV) and Individual Supported Employment (ISE) based on need and availability of funds
 - Transportation Survey:
 - Out of 634 Responses, 2/3 of respondents are satisfied with their current transportation
 - Out of all respondents relying on public transportation 59% felt unsafe doing so, many voiced concerns with accessibility
 - Short term goals based on survey results:
 - Education and Training
 - Access in Rural Areas
 - Funding & Payment
 - Collaboration & Partnerships

- ❖ Catherine DeStefano, Education Services Specialist, West Region
 - Miss DeStefano opened by informing councilmembers that DDS has resources available to help employers who are open to hiring individuals with disabilities, she went on to highlight some networks that DDS works with at the national level, such as The State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) and the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)
 - Community-Based Day Options- a portability fact sheet and DDS Qualified Provider list were shared with viewers.
 - Group Day Supports
 - Individualized Day Support Options (IDS)- Service provides hours based upon LON score allocation.
 - Vocational, Non-Vocational
 - Senior Supports
 - Designed for individuals over 60 years of age
 - Pre-retirement service designed to prevent isolation
 - Encourage social interaction and assist with skill maintenance.
- ❖ Darrell Spears, Education Services Specialist, North Region
 - PRE-EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
 - Employment Transition Services (ETS) is a time limited (6 months- 3 years), community-based, vocational service with a focus on
 - Career Discovery
 - Skill Development
 - Self-Advocacy
 - Goal is to help individuals become equipped and ready for competitive integrated employment through Community Based opportunities
 - Mr Spears went on to share some further updates to the ETS Program:
 - 20% Base Rate increase for Providers
 - Develop incentive driven payments for those who transition individuals to employment
- ❖ Trevor Rogers, Education Services Specialist, Central Office
 - Project Search
 - 9 month internship training program in state run by DDS, Provider Agencies, and School Partners
 - Currently 14 locations across the state
 - Available to:
 - school age, transition age students, youth and young adults
- ❖ Catherine DeStefano, Education Services Specialist, West Region
 - Self-Employment & Small Business Enterprise
 - An outcome achieved with supports and services that help the participant:
 - Identify potential career opportunities
 - Identify necessary supports, including training and supervision for self-employment and entrepreneurial outcomes.
 - Innovative Employment Opportunity (IEO)
 - IEO Notice of Opportunity 2024, Application Deadline: 5pm EST April 12th, 2024
 - Designed to support small businesses and entrepreneurs and promote Competitive Integrated Employment for people with IDD
 - Offers both small “seed money” exploratory grant and a larger implementation/expansion grant
- ❖ Darrell Spears, Education Services Specialist, North Region
 - Group Supported Employment (GSE) is supported employment in a competitive employment environment where a group of participants are working under the supervision of a permanent employment specialist (job coach)

- Services are provided in the community or a facility-based program to focus on developing meaningful skills in the areas of:
 - Work
 - Socialization
 - Community participation.
 - Individual Supported Employment (ISE)
 - Short-term support that includes:
 - Assisting individuals find and apply for jobs
 - Supports to help individuals in competitive work settings
 - Job coaching support once work is secured
- ❖ Trevor Rogers, Education Services Specialist, Central Office
 - Customized Employment (CE) is an alternative method of finding competitive integrated employment for individuals with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities.
 - CE focuses on the strengths, skills and abilities of the individuals and the unmet needs of employers.
 - It is a highly structured, person-centered process, carried out over time in three phases:
 - Job Development
 - Negotiation and Placement
 - Post Employment Supports
 - Individualized Day Vocational (IDV) and Individualized Supported Employment (ISE) Initiatives
 - Additional hours can be requested, those in ISE can also receive supplemental services for socialization or skill development.
- ❖ Catherine DeStefano, Education Services Specialist, West Region
 - EDS Goals for 2024
 1. Work toward increasing opportunities and support for individuals with high level of need
 2. Host monthly EDS/Provider and EDS/Individual, Family, and Support Network Engagement Meetings
 3. Facilitate Customized Employment (CE) Community of Practice –support best practices and increase CE capacity
 4. Employment and Day Services Unit–continue to provide technical assistance, education, and resources to Case Managers, Transition Advisors, and related staff to support informed choice
 5. Support ongoing Provider-led Project SEARCH Community of Practice
 6. Expand outreach to marginalized and underserved groups to increase awareness around employment
 7. Employment Transition Services (ETS) –increase to base rate for Providers. Develop incentive driven payments for those who transition individuals to employment
 8. Peer Mentoring –develop a pipeline to increase the number of peer mentors statewide

This concluded the presentation from the EDS team. At this point the Commissioner fielded questions from the council.

- Councilmember Nicole Milo asked if there were more maps for the different types of day and employment services and where they're located throughout the state. Amber Carter shared that the maps shared are available on the DDS Website, and the EDS team hopes to create a more interactive map in the future.

- Councilmember Michael Bellof asked for clarification on the limitations of support for those using ISE but not competitive employment. Miss Carter explained that this was done to help support those that would need the extra hours for things like additional training or socialization.

Chairperson Silva moved on to the Ombudsperson report next. DDS Ombudsperson Shannon Jacovino shared that was not yet able to answer the questions she received on her report, and she would yield her time and discuss everything in the next meeting. This concluded the Ombudsperson Report

Chairperson Silva next moved on to the Commissioner's Report. Commissioner Scheff gave a brief report, Sharing that much of the information shared in the presentation was collected through conversations with the community in Fall of 2023.

- ❖ He shared that he received some questions about a \$7 million lapse in the governor's proposed budget from the DDS. Commissioner Scheff stated that Secretary Beckham was able to respond to some of those questions earlier in the week and shared some details about concerns with DDS' spending and the impact of the workforce crisis, COVID Fatigue, and a variety of other factors.

This concluded the Commissioner's Report.

- ❖ Legislative Breakfast – Chairperson Silva moved on to the next item, which was the legislative breakfast happening in March. Councilmember Kevin Zingler provided an update to the council, sharing the following:
 - Awardees
 - Payment
 - Schedule
 - Handouts
- ❖ Legislative Updates, Session Dates, Testimony process
- ❖ Family Hearing Day- Thursday, February 29th, from 10:00 to 12:30 and the Legislative Office building room 2C
- ❖ Abuse and Neglect Family Guide- In the interest of saving time, the Council agreed to table the Abuse and Neglect Guide discussion for the March meeting. Motion was made by Kevin Zingler, and seconded by Rick Lenz. The motion passed unanimously.
- ❖ Topics for Future Meetings- Chairperson Silva moved on to future meeting topics, She suggested that March's meeting would be an opportunity to catch up on business, and reminded members that there would be an ARPA Update during the April Meeting. Communications Director Kevin Bronson also shared that either the Commissioner or he himself would be able to provide a more in-depth legislative update as well.
 - Presentations
 - April- ARPA Update, Gunnar Abrahamsson

This concluded the discussion items, Chairperson Silva asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion was made by Councilmember Pam DonAroma and seconded by Councilmember Christine Hainsworth-Straus. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:56 pm

Minutes Recorded by:
Wesaneit Tsegai
Executive Secretary
DDS Central Office