

# **DDS North Region Regional Advisory Council**

January 16, 2019  
Meeting Minutes

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Members Present: Rick Rothstein (Chair); Kathleen Tetreault (Vice Chair); Tammy Selinger (Secy.); Donna Clauson; Donna Cohen; Joe Duffy; Collette Langner; Ron Langner; Mary Lou O'Connor; Annette Scully; Tammy Selinger; Elisa Velardo, DDS North Regional Director

Guest: Pat Stavola

Meeting was called to order at 5:10 pm.

- Legislative Update –
  - There was discussion regarding the changes in the legislature following the election. It was stated that some of the legislators who were familiar with families and issues are no longer there. One being Beth Bye who has been nominated to lead the Office of Early Childhood in the Lamont administration. Others have moved from the Senate to the House. Some work will need to be done to help familiarize the new members with important issues. There has been a major change in the makeup of the General Assembly. Last year there were 18 Democrats and 18 Republicans. This year there are 24 Democrats and 12 Republicans. There is now a Democratic majority in both chambers.
    - 2/25/19 is Family Hearing Day at 10:00am
    - DD Council Legislative Breakfast is also 2/25/19 at 8:00am
  - The final Human Services Report has not come out yet.
  - Collette and Ron Langner hosted their new Senator and Representative who were very understanding and well-versed in State government and very sympathetic for what families have had to go through. Tammy and Andrew Selinger also hosted their new legislator who was also very supportive.
  - The IDD Caucus is holding a briefing on 1/31/19 for legislators.
  - 2/26/19 will be a special election for the seats that have been vacated.
  - Krista Ostaszewski is the new DDS Legislative Liaison (replacing Christine Pollio Cooney)
  - Commissioner Scheff has been re-appointed, as has Deputy Commissioner Peter Mason
  - Rick Rothstein stated that he would like to commend the Commissioner and the Regional Directors specifically for
    - 1) The changes to the waitlist which really encapsulates the needs better and the information in the MIR which is posted quarterly.
    - 2) Finally updating the DDS website.
    - 3) The family meetings that were held with Commissioner Scheff around the state. Elisa added that each one had a different flavor, and it was great to see people networking and sharing information.

- Regional Director's Update:
  - Elisa Velardo reported that we are very happy to be able to have continuity with Commissioner Scheff and Deputy Commissioner Mason so that things that are being developed can continue. There are many things happening simultaneously right now that will hopefully be moving us forward.
  - Individual & Family Support (IFS) works with families with individuals living at home. The families work with the Case Management Helpline and most receive family grants. The Family Grant program has now been centralized so the response is more consistent across the state. This year they have been able to find some efficiencies which has enabled the grant program to prevent some families from going into crisis. Family Support Workers have been going into family homes to assist with benefits, taking people to medical appointments, recreational activities, etc. There were 7 Family Support Workers for the North Region which was very difficult and services have had to be focused on the most urgent needs. It has been decided that the program will now be expanded, and each region will increase the number of support workers to 18. This is possible because it will be tied to the \$5 million emergency funds to help prevent crisis situations from occurring. DDS has also been working with DMHAS and DCF. A crisis response number, that will always be covered across all three regions, is being set up so services can be expanded to evenings and weekends. Specialized training on trauma is being held by Karyn Harvey and Dr. Peter Tolisano. These trainings are beginning with DDS staff first (in January and February) and then will also be offered to providers, DMHAS, etc.
  - A wage increase for providers has gone through as of January 1<sup>st</sup>. Wages will be increase to \$14.75 which should make a difference with retention and recruitment. Although the allocation did not cover all of the increase, so some providers that were already over \$14.75 and were supposed to increase up to 5%, were not able to do the full 5%. It should be a step in the right direction though.
  - The Step-down Unit at the Hartford Regional Center in Newington should be ready to open over the next couple of weeks. They have been busy with staffing, and training staff. There will be clinical staff as well. This will be a place for people to come and stabilize, and be able to move out, so they will not have to remain in a hospital. Elisa will invite staff that oversee the Unit to come to one of the RAC meetings after it has been open for a couple of months.
  - Assistive Technology – Amy Blazawski (NR) is the statewide coordinator for this initiative. It is a waived service and a directive has been given by the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner to look at ways that assistive technology can help individuals and families.

There will also be a Assistive Technology representative on the PRAT teams to consider ways that assistive technology may be able to help in specific situations. Amy is holding informational sessions at several locations. They are scheduled for:

- 1/23/19 (date shared incorrectly as 1/25) – 1:00 East Hartford
- 2/7/19 – 1:00 Wallingford
- 2/13 – 1:00 Cheshire

Amy Blazawski will also be attending the February RAC meeting.

- Amber Burke is the new statewide Director of Employment. Elisa will invite her to attend an upcoming meeting. As opportunities have become more limited, there is a need to focus on different ways to look at employment which is what Amber will be doing. She will be working with employers, providers, and families. A Provider Readiness Conference is being held next week and she will be presenting.
- CCH – we have been continuing with the CCH initiative. Twenty placements have been identified for each region. We are approximately half way there. Kim Smith, CCH Manager, has received several calls from people wanting to become licensees. Six new agencies statewide are now providing CCH services which will increase capacity. We have also been working with existing agencies to develop CCH's.
- IDASH – the first program should be opening within a year, hopefully. Two have been identified in the North Region. People living in CLA's and CRS's that want to move will be given priority.
- The list for Elderly Caregivers has been re-run. The first time some people on the list were not ready for anything. We are now in the process of reaching out to people on the planning list for people over 70. Elisa clarified after the meeting that the new list is for caregivers over 70 years for both underserved and no serve.
- Pat Stavola shared that she attended the Intelligent Lives film and it was very good. The screening was held and then a discussion afterward. The focus of the discussion was the IQ being used as a determining factor for eligibility. The film will be run again.
- Motion to adjourn was made and seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Claudia Neumann*

Executive Secretary