

# **DDS North Region Regional Advisory Council**

September 18, 2019  
Meeting Minutes

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Members Present: Rick Rothstein (Chair); Donna Clauson; Donna Cohen; Joe Duffy; Collette Bement Langner; Annette Scully; Tammy Selinger; Andrew Selinger; Elisa Velardo, DDS North Regional Director

Guests: Pat Stavola

Meeting was called to order at 5:10 pm

- Council Chair Rick Rothstein began the meeting by stating that he had sent an email to members that included the language from the DDS website regarding what the charge of the RAC is. He shared that statement which says that the "...council shall have the responsibility of consulting with and advising the director of the region on the needs of persons with intellectual disability in the region, the annual plan and budget of the region and other matters deemed appropriate by the council." In keeping with that charge, and after attending the Family Forum that was held in the NR with Commissioner Scheff, he decided that the topic of Day and Employment Services should be part of the agenda for tonight's meeting. This was a large topic at the family forum and Rick has heard from several families who are concerned about the possibility of the Group Supported Employment programs ending and where the Department is heading. They would like the opportunity to provide input.
- Day and Employment Services Discussion
  - Mr. Duffy shared that even though all along it has been being said that this is being pushed federally, he has spoken with someone directly in Washington who is involved who knew nothing about the damage it would cause if the 14c proposal were to go forward. There was discussion regarding the feeling that both federal and state legislators and national groups that are supporting it are only hearing that people are being treated unfairly by being paid less than minimum wage and think people are being exploited and need to be protected. While this may be true in some cases, and people should be protected from being exploited, the concern is that they are not also getting information about people who this may unintentionally hurt. The legislators need to be better educated that there are people that may be in jobs that pay sub-minimum wage, but these are jobs that work well for them and allow them to participate in activities and meaningful work situations that have helped them succeed. They are working with private agencies that are protecting them, and are giving them meaningful jobs where they earn a good amount for the work they are doing. The amount of money is not what is most important. There are some individuals that cannot work in a competitive employment environment. The fear is that if GSE were to go away, a lot of people would lose jobs that are helping them be successful and there would be no alternative opportunity for them.
  - Elisa Velardo, Regional Director, gave an update regarding planned focus groups that are being scheduled on Reimagining Day Services. There will be six meetings held in each region. Two meetings with families, two with providers, and two with DDS staff. The purpose will be to get feedback from all groups. DDS will be looking at reconfiguring day services. While we will be looking at getting more people out of segregated settings, we are not looking to take anything away from people's current programs that are working well. The move will be toward customized employment, which would be minimum wage, however, it is realized that the same thing will not work for everyone.

The Family meetings in the North Region will be held as follows:

10/15/19 at the Willimantic Office from 5:00pm-6:30pm

10/23/19 at the East Hartford Office from 5:00pm-6:30pm

We will share the notice for the meetings when it is sent out. It was asked why the meetings are being held in separate groups. Elisa explained that it was only to make it possible logistically. Since it is such a large group of people, it needed to be split into several meetings. We do not have a large enough space to accommodate everyone at once.

Elisa stated that DDS does understand the concerns. While we do definitely support employment, we also are aware that sub-minimum wage jobs are working well for some people. This is a process that will not happen suddenly, and we want to make sure to hear from everyone while moving ahead. The purpose of the Forums is to gather input from all to make sure that no one is left behind.

- The entrepreneur incentive applications were discussed and it was shared that there were 29 submitted, and of those, 26 were accepted and were given money. They all had to be submitted with a formal business plan and they were reviewed just as all regular small business start-up proposals are reviewed. One of the individuals that was awarded the financing was a person who attended one of our past meetings to share her stress balls that she has been making to sell. She also attended the Commissioner's forum, and her product was a big hit. It is great that she will now have the opportunity to pursue her business further.
- There was further discussion that there is also a concern that while it is understood that people with medical or physical disabilities need special accommodations, it is not understood that people with behavioral or psychological issues that cannot be seen, also need to be considered. It was stated that more focus should be put on specialized training for staff to be able to work with those individuals with more needs. Just being able to get out and socialize and participate is a huge step for some. The wages are not the most important part. It was again stated that this is the intent of having the focus groups to get feedback on what needs to be considered.
- There was discussion about communication with families about what happens when a person ages out. Elisa explained that we now have three Transition Advisors that have been working very diligently with the schools to increase awareness about DDS. Elisa will invite one of them to attend one of our RAC upcoming meetings to share more of what they do.
- ID Partnership - Collette Bement Langner, who serves on the committee, shared some of the initiatives that they have been working on. \$1.5M was given for the first year to help move the department forward. The next meeting of the group will be on October 31<sup>st</sup>.
  - \$500,000 was put toward the blended services pilot for a small group (about 10), which seems to be working well.
  - Money for Assistive Technology to be used to train private provider staff in the use of AT and how it can be helpful for individuals to be more independent. Rick Rothstein shared the new AT newsletter and Elisa stated that Patricia Cymbala, who helped produce the newsletter would attend our November meeting to present more about what is happening with AT.
  - The Commissioner is also exploring the possibility of developing a program like a College of Independent Living. The state owns a property that was once a convent that has a lot of space. At some point, we would like to look at possibly setting up a program to have people live there for a month or two to receive training for skills to better prepare them for daily living. This is being considered for a future plan, it is not yet in process.

- Other News:
  - Two task forces are being developed and will begin meeting next week. One was included in a bill two years ago to review future needs and will include four parents, four legislators, Krista, and others. Joe Duffy will be part of this group. The second will be on employment, which is being developed. There will also be a task force on underserved individuals which will include only state officials.
  - DORS is being renamed to the Department of Aging and Developmental Services.
- Regional Director Updates
  - Grads – About half of the grads are placed, there are about 60 left to go. Some are working with BRS, and some are ready to go.
  - Central Office Roofing Project – Elisa shared that this may affect people that have to attend meetings or go to CO. It will be under construction for several months. The main entrance may be closed, and parking will be affected. Some CO staff have been temporarily relocated within the regions.
  - Step-Down Unit – The program is still taking referrals and it continues to be full. There have been five individuals there at a time. Some people have already successfully moved out. The program is doing great.
  - Enhanced Family Support – Since data collection began in the first quarter when we only had 7 family support workers, it shows a 161% increase in hours of service. We now have 18 workers who go into people's homes to provide support when there is a crisis. Julia Walsh has been working on providing data so we will be able to report on the level of services being provided. DDS has also been working very closely with DCF and DMHAS. Education was needed to be provided between agencies. Agencies have been meeting on a regular basis with crisis stabilization teams. We should see a different kind of working relationship going forward.
  - RFP for Emergency Transitional Housing – Three Public settings have been identified to be used. They are located in Meriden, Norwich, and Wilton. This will be a place where people can go on a temporary basis as needed. Examples would be if a caregiver needs to have surgery and will need some recovery time, when someone is in the hospital and does not need to stay there but needs somewhere to go until a longer term option is identified, etc. It will be Public property, but will be run by a private provider.
  - Respite expanded - A fourth respite center has been opened in the North Region. It is located in Putnam and an Open House was held recently for families and potential guests. All of the Centers, Putnam as well as the other three located in Newington, Storrs, and Windsor, will be Smart Homes and will be equipped with Assistive Technology so that guests can see how it may work for individuals who stay there. Technology being installed is things such as smart TV's, voice activation devices, and Ring doorbells.
  - Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) – This is a federal program that is now coming to CT for people living in apartments on their own or who self-direct so staff will electronically check in when they arrive and leave. CFC has already started using it. DDS expects to begin around the first of the year.

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 pm.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 16, 2019 at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Claudia Neumann*  
Executive Secretary