

**DDS North Region**  
**Regional Advisory Council**

February 16, 2022

Meeting Minutes – Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams (meeting was recorded)

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Members Present: Kathleen Hayes, Chair; Annette Scully, Vice Chair; Donna Cohen; Donna Clauson; Kim Little; Ellyn Little; Rick Rothstein; Lori Sandora; Tammy Selinger; Elisa Velardo, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member)

Guests: Norma LaMonaco; Melissa Barr Cruz; Adrianna Ramirez, CTFSN; Crystal Sacco, CTFSN; Susan Lucek-Hughes; Bonnie Potocki; James ; Shannon Jacovino, DDS; Dr. Cheryl Ellis, DDS; Josh Scalora, DDS

Meeting called to order at 5:02pm.

Meeting began with introductions.

- Approval of Minutes – Minutes from the January meeting were reviewed by members. A motion to approve was made by Donna Cohen; seconded by Lori Sandora. Minutes were approved unanimously.
- Dr. Cheryl Ellis, DDS Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion – Dr. Ellis shared that the agency has a strong commitment to ensuring that everyone has a voice at the table. She has been charged with making sure that individuals and families are heard in the work that DDS is doing, as well as making sure that we are providing services that include diversity. She will be holding “Coffee Conversations” beginning with DDS staff as an opportunity to ensure that we are being inclusive to everyone. Dr. Ellis shared that she came from DMHAS and that she is still learning about DDS and our services. Her goals for the next year include organizing a committee to work on developing what the mission and vision is as a DEI agency.
- Shannon Jacovino, DDS Ombudsperson – Shannon started in her position as Ombudsperson in November and shared that her job is to be a neutral party when someone reaches out with an issue that they are having difficulty resolving to try to come to a mutual understanding with all parties. She would also like to work on promoting policies and issues that will help people with IDD to get better supports throughout their community. She is also working with the Council on Development Services and the Commissioner to work on any issues that people feel need attention. The next Council meeting is scheduled for this Thursday. Shannon will send a link for the meeting if anyone would like to attend. Shannon stated that no one should hesitate to contact her with any issues that she may be able to assist with coming to a resolution and working on a path forward.
  - A question was asked regarding families and provider not being able to find staff. Shannon suggested that the issue be brought to the legislature to make them aware. The legislative session began last week. The staffing issue is widespread and is a problem that the whole community will have to work through together.
- Legislative Update:
  - The session began last Thursday, 2/9.
  - Rick Rothstein shared the following information –
    - The Governor’s proposed adding 150 slots to the Autism Waiver
    - Private providers were disappointed that there was no increase in rates in the Governor’s proposal
    - Dealing with labor situation that is very difficult; there is a lot of pressure to improve recruitment and wages
    - Residential waitlist also needs to be a focus
    - The Appropriations Committee will meet on 2/24/22; testimony will begin at 2:00pm

- Regional Director's Update – Elisa Velardo
  - NCI's (National Core Indicators) – The NCI project is continuing; have been busy getting surveyors trained which has been a more extensive process this year. Outreach to participants should be beginning as of this week.
  - COVID-19 Update – There is continued strain on our system and the staffing issue continues to be very pervasive. COVID numbers have gone down significantly though, and this is the first week that there have been no new cases reported. The decrease has not correlated to an increase in staff, however. The staffing issue has affected all areas, including people that are self-directing and providers. During meetings with providers, the issue has been the predominant conversation and providers have stated that it has been an “all hands on deck” situation. People outside of the direct support role have all been covering, such as managers driving individuals to day program, passing meds, etc.
    - An extension has been granted for training since some of the trainers have had to be in coverage; extended from 2/16 to 5/31
    - New Employee Training extended from 30 to 45 days, however, employees cannot work alone until they have completed the required training
    - The hold on licensing will continue through March
    - In-person visits for case managers will resume on 2/28, however, families will still have the option if they are still not comfortable
    - An inter-agency task force is looking into Medication Administration. Dr. Val Bagby-Young has been participating on behalf of DDS. They are now piloting the training being available virtually. The Pass & Pour portion, however, will continue to be done in person with a nurse present.
    - The staffing issue has been particularly difficult in the area of nursing.
  - Respite will resume as of 2/24/22. Rapid test kits will be used within 24 hours for guests coming to the respite centers.
  - Remote Support Pilot Project – A meeting has been held with the two providers that will be participating in the pilot (Midstate and the ARC of Eastern CT). They have each identified 10 individuals. Midstate has 5 people already in place. They are focusing on having people be able to be as independent as possible. Some are already living in their own apartment and are looking at additional assistive technology tools that would work to assist them. ARC of Eastern CT will be mostly new people. The two agencies are working closely together to share what is working. Elisa will share success stories at future RAC meetings.
    - 89 DDS staff are going through training, provided by SHIFT, on Assistive Technology.
  - DDS is currently going through a review with OIG, with their focus being on Critical Incident Reporting and Abuse & Neglect. Within the Region, we have been reviewing all critical incidents that occurred in 2020 to ensure that follow up was appropriate. All reports are being reviewed to make sure that they meet the definition of being a critical incident. The process is also being refined to ensure that the people reporting understand the definitions and that appropriate follow up is occurring.
  - Amber Burke will be attending the March RAC meeting to discuss Employment and SELN.
  - Supported Housing – Josh Scalora joined tonight's meeting to discuss Supported Housing.
    - Supported Housing is a model where housing finance organizations are partnering with Social Services and human services agencies. The IDASH program was a specific type of program to develop Supportive Housing opportunities. Three have been developed in the North Region (Canton, Bloomfield, and Hartford). Two of the three are already open, the third should be opening soon; two are with FAVARH and one with HARC. All the money that was set aside for IDASH has already been expended.
    - OPM (the funding agency) is very interested in exploring more cost effective, less expensive programs. The programs are shared with developers for tax credits to work with providers to develop the Supported Housing opportunities. The providers, developer, and the Department have worked very well as a partnership to provide a needed service.

- Meeting was adjourned at 7:04 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

***Claudia Neumann***

Executive Secretary

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