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State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

South Region



Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

Cres Secchiaroli
South Region Director

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)
Meeting Minutes
Recorded on April 19, 2023
Guilford Free Library, 67 Park St., Guilford**

Attendees: Cres Secchiaroli, Regional Director; Lynn Arezzini, Vice Chair; Carol Cooney, Secretary; Jennifer Cooney; Kate Haaland; Noreen Hills, Executive Secretary; Nancy Kala; Haley Parent

Guests Attending: David Arezzini; Heidi Earle

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:20pm. Regional Director (RD) Cres Secchiaroli apologized for the late start due to technical difficulties. He asked the Council and guests to introduce themselves.

Citizen Comment:

Heidi Earle stated that the paperwork to hire private-hire staff is very taxing. It takes 4+ hours to complete. She inquired as to why if the potential staff person switches agencies, does all the paperwork need to be filled out again since they already went through background checks previously? RD Secchiaroli explained that there is still an obligation to complete background checks just in case something new has come up as well as to make sure all the trainings are up to date. Ms. Earle suggests having DDS streamline the paperwork and asks that DDS keep track of the people who may have a harder time filling out the extensive paperwork.

David Arezzini stated that he is happy that there is a forum to discuss issues. He stated that there continues to be staffing shortages due to call-outs, etc. He is getting older and caring for his son is more difficult, especially because some staff have a hard time with technology. His son gets very frustrated when his technology isn't working correctly, then staff call Mr. Arezzini and he has to either guide the staff via phone or go to his son's residence to help figure out the issue. Mr. Arezzini inquired about the Westville housing project and if it was moving forward. RD Secchiaroli stated he will report about the housing project in the Regional Director's Updates.

Regional Director's Updates:

Supported Housing Project – To date there are three (3) supported housing projects that have been approved and are in process; one in Orange, one in Pawtucket, and one in New London. There is also a housing project being proposed in Westville. The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) will be holding a meeting on April 27, 2023, to announce the awardees from the most recent round of developments submitted for tax credits

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from CHFA and the Department of Housing. The developments are slated to have 10% of the residences for people with Intellectual Disabilities or Developmental Disabilities, plus one apartment for the staff of the private provider. The other residents will consist of anyone who meets the housing qualifications. RD Secchiaroli offered to make arrangements for the RAC to visit one of the housing projects.

South Region Waitlist – RD Secchiaroli explained that he is required yearly to give an update on the South Region Wait List but is willing to provide an update anytime for the RAC Council. Currently, the South Region has 216 individuals on the residential wait list:

South Region Waitlist #'s

36 Emergencies

158 Urgent Need – No Service

22 Urgent Need – Underserved

RD Secchiaroli explained that the Case Managers submit a request to the Planning and Resource Allocation Team (PRAT), to discuss the needs of the individual, and determine if they meet the specified criteria for emergency needs. The individual's team works on getting the needed supports. DDS also has a Planning/Future Needs list which has been established for an individual's planned future need(s) that are not presently urgent but will be needed in the future.

The administrative teams met and decided that funds will be used to provide the needed support for individuals on the Waitlist, which included enhance family support, urgent underserved support, and elderly caregivers support for caregivers 68 years and older (previously 72 years and older).

Initiatives Update

Enhanced Family Support – 29 individuals have been placed

Underserved – 36 individuals have been placed

Elderly Caregiver – 51 individuals were identified; 32 have been placed; 11 have declined; 7 have been allocated funding but have not utilized them as of yet (4 for placement; 3 for IHS); 1 still awaiting response

House Bill 5001 – The first bill on the legislative docket is the Speaker of the House's bill, HB 5001. HB 5001 includes added support for DDS services. Many of the legislators are cosigners and helping to back the bill.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – ARPA is federal funding, with a time limit, designated to help individuals transition to independence and technology-based services. DDS's ARPA Committees are looking how to best designate the funding to increase and encourage independence.

Council Open Discussion:

Carol Cooney asked why the Commissioner's community meeting dates and topics have changed. RD Secchiaroli explained that the meetings are set up through the cochairs of the Engagement Committee, Shannon Jacovino, Ombudsperson, and Greg McMahon, former Assistant Regional Director.

Employment – If there are no options for employment or day services, does the individual need to go on a wait list? RD Secchiaroli explained there is no waitlist for day programs. He speculates that the delay in services may be due to the staffing crisis that is affecting both DDS and private providers, as well as the baby boom

population who live at home but now require more support. Employers are competing with each other to try to obtain and retain staff. ARPA funds have been used for salaries and benefits for the private providers. The minimum wage for private provider direct care has been increased to \$17.50 per hour.

Transportation – Carol expressed that transportation has been an issue, at times taking up to 2 hours. She wanted to know if there were any DDS guidelines that should be followed by the private provider. RD Secchiaroli stated there are no guidelines for transportation, although it is an initiative that DDS is working on.

Information to Families about RAC – Lynn stated that according to statute, RAC information needs to be presented at the individual’s IP meeting to communicate with the families. It was suggested that the Council draft a message and RD Secchiaroli will look into sending it to the South Region families.

Officer Elections – RD Secchiaroli and Noreen Hills will work with Gunnar on the process of terms that are expiring. As of right now, it looks like the Council is in the need of a Chair; Lynn Arezzini is the Vice-Chair; and Carol Cooney is the Secretary.

New Business:

We have received a request from DDS Employment Services asking if they could provide a presentation on Customized Employment Services during the June 14, 2023, RAC meeting. The Council agreed.

DDS Legal Division has posted a position for an attorney. Once that person is hired, RD Secchiaroli will work with the Legal Division to provide a presentation on guardianship.

Adjournment:

Carol Cooney made a motion and Lynn Arezzini seconded to adjourn the South Region Regional Advisory Council meeting at 7:23pm. All in favor, motion passed.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:

Noreen Hills

Regional Executive Secretary