



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

Jordan A. Scheff
Commissioner

Elisa F. Velardo
Deputy Commissioner

**South Region Regional Advisory Council (RAC)
Meeting Minutes
January 17, 2024
Guilford Free Library, 67 Park St., Guilford**

Attendees: Lynn Arezzini, Chair; Kathryn Haaland, Vice Chair; Carol Cooney, Secretary; Ashley Dennis; Amy French; Nancy Kalal; Kathryn Kimball; Diane Martin; Cres Secchiaroli, Regional Director; Noreen Hills, Executive Secretary

Guests attending: Malcolm Brinton; Kelly Cronin, Kelly's Kids; Heidi Earle; Jacob Earle; Kristina Hammond, UCFS; Rachel Kessler, CTFSN; Lisa Nee; Twila Skelly

Absent: Erin McGuire; Haley Parent

Call to Order

Lynn Arezzini called the meeting to order at 6:07p with introductions.

Approval of September 20, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Nancy Kalal made a motion to accept the September 20, 2023 South Region Regional Advisory Council minutes; Kathryn Haaland seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed.

Citizens Comments

- Kelly Cronin explained that she has opened Kelly's Kids as an afternoon program. The program is located on farmland in Prospect. They are DDS licensed and capable of enrolling DDS individuals. The individuals learn social skills by helping with the care of the animals, chores on the farm and community connections. Kelly's vision is to create a parents support group as well. She was asked if the program provides transportation for the DDS individuals. A van will be awarded in their DDS contract.
- Malcolm Brinton explains that he helps people like Kelly be able to open day programs, IHS supports, respite, and companion supports for individuals with developmental disabilities. He has 30 years experience working in DDS and private providers.
- Twila Skelly stated that her daughter is currently with Aspire. She would like more information regarding AIMS testing and if there is an alternative for individuals who cannot sit still for long periods of time. RD Secchiaroli offered to talk with her after the meeting.
- Nancy Kalal stated that low-income housing can be built anywhere without going under the regular housing rules. She needs what is required by DDS for housing. RD Secchiaroli explained that there needs to be a community room within the complex that the provider needs to arrange community

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gatherings. The builders typically provide 10% of the residential for individuals with disabilities. RD Secchiaroli will facilitate a call with Nancy and DDS Director of Housing, Elba Caraballo.

Regional Director's Update

RD Secchiaroli started his update by wishing everyone a happy new year.

- Legislative Session – DDS is not anticipating a big legislative session for changes within DDS. We are working on language to share with stakeholders.
- Funding Initiatives – There is a new funding initiative for aging caregivers 65 and older. This will help individuals on the WaitList who are waiting for residential services. Last fiscal year, we were able to decrease the WaitList by 25% with the funding initiatives. This initiative includes focusing on non-traditional supports and services with the seven (7) STEP Initiatives:
 - Individualized Home Support (IHS)
 - Supportive Housing
 - Community Companion Homes (CCH)
 - Assistive Technology (AT)
 - Remote Supports
 - Employment
 - Self-Direction
- Self Advocate Coordinators (SAC) are individuals supported by the Department and hired to be state employees. DDS is expanding from three (3) to four (4) SACs for each region. SACs hold a lot of influence in the Department as they are part of committees and leadership.
- DDS has placed two (2) providers on enhanced monitoring due to significant deficits. The Department is supporting them to help correct the issues. One provider has had their worksite closed, which will affect them fiscally. Heidi Earle asked who the providers are. RD Secchiaroli explained that anyone who was affected by the enhanced monitoring, would be notified by their Case Manager.
- RD Secchiaroli is trying to visit more providers. He discovered that one of the providers has a food bank that is specifically for individuals with disabilities.

Council Open Discussion

Amy French asked for suggestions and advice regarding a nonprofit business that she has opened with her daughter. She is looking to become a DDS service provider. Right now, she works with individuals supported by Lighthouse. Amy has completed the DDS paperwork and found a location in Pawcatuck. Malcolm Brinton offered to help.

Carol Cooney suggesting having more SAC members on the RAC. RD Secchiaroli stated that the SR RAC has 10 members according to their by-laws. He explained that the state statute states there should be at least 10 members, and the SR RAC by-laws state that the RAC shall have 10 members, which is what the RAC currently has. Members will consist of an ARC of Connecticut member, a member who receives DDS services, and at least two (2) parents of individuals who receive DDS services. The by-laws also state that members who have not been present for three (3) consecutive meetings can be asked to leave.

Diane Martin inquired about the Paid Caregiver Act. RD Secchiaroli explained that the language has been drafted, submitted for public comment, comments were addressed, and it was submitted to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). DDS is waiting for comments from CMS if it's been accepted. RD Secchiaroli gave an update with the caveat that since it has not been approved yet, the final may be different. He explained that the language states there are five (5) types of services that will be covered: respite, day services, IHS, personal support, and companion (any service with a personal care component). There will be two (2) requirements: 1) 18 years and younger – needs to be extraordinary services required of a caregiver; 2) 18 year and older – has a limit of the number hours that can be submitted; the Employee of Record (EOR) cannot be the caregiver, as well as other requirements. This has been created to help with the staffing crisis.

2024 Meeting Schedule

The Council discussed the 2024 RAC meeting schedule, which must have at least six (6) meetings within a calendar year, that includes the November statewide RAC meeting. Carol Cooney made a motion and Ashley Dennis seconded to follow the 2024 RAC meeting schedule presented below. All in favor, motion passed.

- 2024 RAC Meeting Schedule
 - January 17, 2024
 - March 20, 2024
 - May 15, 2024
 - July 17, 2024
 - September 18, 2024
 - November (TBD) Statewide RAC Meeting
 - Meetings can be called by the Council as needed.

New Business

- **Assistive Technology** – Lynn Arezzini and her son attended an AT&Me meeting which her son was given a tech bag that included an iPhone, tablet, hotspot, etc. The only issue is that the individual receiving the bag is required to attend the training and is expected to train others. Both Lynn and Kate Haaland explained that it is very hard to have their individuals attend these type of required meetings as they get restless. Kate also stated that the Case Manager was unaware of AT&Me.
- **Employment Forum** – Trevor Rogers presented at prior RAC meeting.
- **Cluster Homes** – Discussed during the Regional Director's report.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Carol Cooney made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:58p and Kathryn Haaland seconded. All in favor, motion passed.

Nothing Follows //

Minutes recorded by:
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