

West Region Advisory Council

Minutes

Via Teleconference

4:00 p.m.

April 21, 2022

Participants:

Sue Bastien, Chuck Bergamo, Marina Derman, Lori Chiappenello, Fritz Gorst, Mickey Herbst, Gil Kellersman, Roger McNealy, Karen Simon, Arlene Steinfeld

1. CALL TO ORDER –

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 pm

2. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETINGS MINUTES –

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Council voted to approve the Minutes of March 17, 2022.

3. ROLL CALL –

Each participating member of the Regional Advisory Council introduced themselves.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT –

- **Future Meetings:** Mr. Bergamo stated indicated that he will invite the Chairperson from the North Region RAC and South Region RAC to join a future meeting to share ideas and discuss what they are doing on their Councils.
- **Paid Caregivers:** Mr. Bergamo shared that he is working on exploring ways to have guardians paid for providing care to their family members. At present, guardians cannot be paid caregivers in Connecticut. Mr. Bergamo indicated that he is aware that guardians are paid caregivers in New York, and he cannot understand why residents of Connecticut aren't able to be paid caregivers if this is a Federal rule. He feels that this can help address staffing issues which are presently quite problematic. Families are having a hard time hiring staff and/or keeping staff. Mr. Bergamo will provide an update on the status of this as he gets more information.
- **Membership:** Mr. Bergamo explained to the RAC that members should be looking for individuals to replace them on the Council. Each of the members on the Council have exceeded their term. Anyone that has information on individuals interested in serving on the Council can share that with Mr. Bergamo. Potential members will need to express interest in writing and forward to Mr. Bergamo. He shared that he is aware of two individuals that are teachers that might be interested in serving in the future. Fritz advised him to forward letters of interest to him so that the membership can be reviewed and sent to Central Office for final approval.
 - Cindy Stramandinoli has resigned from the West Region Advisory Council.

5. REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S UPDATE –

- **Retirements:** Many staff have retired from DDS on April 1, 2022. There is another round of staff expected to retire on July 1, 2022. This is due to contractual changes effective July 1, 2022 that effect medical insurance and cost of living adjustments (COLAs).

Retirees:

- Peter Mason (Deputy Commissioner) has been replaced by Elyssa Velardo (former North Region Regional Director); Elyssa has been replaced by Stacy Silva Gordon (she was former Private Asst. Regional Director).
 - Thomas Daley (Regional Director – South Region); has returned as a Temporary Worker Retiree (TWR) for 120 days.
 - Eugene Harvey (Regional Director – Southbury Training School); has returned as a TWR.
 - Many case managers and direct care workers have also retired, and some have returned as TWRs.
- **Budget:** We seem to be in good shape.

6. NEW BUSINESS

None

7. OLD BUSINESS

- **Staffing Issues:** Staffing at private agencies and day programs continues to be problematic. There was a brief discussion on strategies for staffing (i.e. hiring immigrants to cover shortages). Nursing shortages are also an issue. This impacts 1:1 care. Agencies are struggling to provide transportation which affects families and some of these families are being forced to quit their jobs to provide transportation and caregiver coverage.

Marina shared that she is aware of an agency in the Waterbury area that seems to be doing well with their staffing. The group would like to know what methods that agency is using to maintain and recruit staff.

- **Remote Meetings:** The group discussed future meetings via the Microsoft Teams format. The consensus is that if they can continue meeting using a remote format it would be helpful since the geographic area of the region is large. In the past, it has been difficult to find a location that works for most members. If it is required to meet in person, it was suggested that the group meet once or twice per year in person. Otherwise, the remote format is preferred.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

9. NEXT MEETING –

- May 19, 2022 at 4pm via teleconference; invitations will be sent out via Outlook.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Council adjourned the meeting at 4:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Eunice B. Rivera
Executive Secretary, DDS West Region