

West Region Advisory Council

Minutes  
Via Teleconference  
4:00 p.m.  
September 15, 2022

**Participants:**

Chuck Bergamo, Lori Chiapiniello, Marina Derman, Fritz Gorst, Gil Kellersman, Shannon O'Brien, Karen Simon, Arlene Steinfeld

1. CALL TO ORDER –

***The meeting was called to order at 4:07 pm***

Members were advised that moving forward all virtual meetings would be recorded.

2. ROLL CALL –

Each participating member of the Regional Advisory Council introduced themselves.

3. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETINGS MINUTES –

***Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Council voted to approve the Minutes of May 19, 2022.***

4. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT –

Mr. Bergamo welcomed everybody to the meeting. He introduced himself as the chairperson of the West Regional Advisory Council.

He inquired if there were any members from the public online? No one from the public replied.

Mr. Bergamo advised the group that the meeting is being recorded.

He reminded everyone, that if there is a vote on anything (like approval of Minutes) it has to be done by roll call unless the vote is unanimous. If there is a reason for the group not have a unanimous vote, then they all have to go member my member; but if it is unanimous, a roll call is not needed.

Everyone introduced themselves and explained their connection to the Council and how they became involved.

5. REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S UPDATE –

Fritz explained his involvement with the region. He retired on June 30<sup>th</sup> and started working on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He has returned as a temporary worker retiree on a per diem basis to assist Shannon O'Brien (Regional Director) until replacements are made for the Assistant Regional Director's of Individual & Family Support as well as the Assistant Regional Director for the Private Division. He is also assisting with the hiring of Case Manager Supervisor vacancies as well. We are trying to navigate the new centralized human resources system, which is a little challenging than the previous regional human resources process.

In addition to the recruitment process, Fritz is conducting Programmatic Administrative Reviews, reviewing investigations, Human Rights, and forensics.

He shared that we had a little COVID spike in the Spring. It quieted down in the summer. The hope is the numbers stay low with many people being vaccinated.

Shannon O'Brien introduced herself. She began with DDS over 30 years ago at the Southbury Training School. She explained her different roles in the Department and that she is excited to be the new Regional Director.

She explained how she is familiar with some of the members of the RAC and that she looks forward to getting to know everyone in the group.

- Funding for elderly care givers. The Department will be pulling data on family caregivers 73 years and older. If they previously requested funding from the Department and were denied, they will be given some funding.
- Initiatives: Creative Housing Options (i.e. CCH). Anyone interested in this model is welcome to request it. Information on remote supports is also being shared. She explained that if families are in need of staffing, that might be a little challenging because many agencies are having difficulty staffing their programs. The Department is looking at more initiatives to address some areas in need of attention. DDS is holding virtual presentations that families can view. They are also available on-line to be viewed if families cannot attend when they are being recorded live. Shannon Jacovino (DDS Ombudsperson) has been sending out information via email. Mr. Bergamo advised Ms. Steinfeld to send her name to Ms. Jacovino to get on the email list. Mr. Bergamo also said he would share the information that he has received with the Council.
- Riverfront – housing for individuals has been developed in the Torrington area. 60 units are in the building with 12 units for DDS individuals. This is a beautiful new building and she explained how excited the Department is to have this housing available for our consumers. The ribbon cutting is taking place the first week of October 2022.
- Respite Centers – are up and running. Families are actively using our respite centers (Northwest Respite Center/Torrington, Lower Fairfield Center Respite/Norwalk, Sprucebrook Respite Center/Southbury, White Plains Road Respite Center/Stratford). Lower Fairfield Center will be a medical model because it is one level.
- Wilton House – 3-bedroom home operated by CPM. Is an emergency transitional home in Wilton, Connecticut. Individuals in an emergency are able to go to this home temporarily until a more permanent option is found. The other regions also have a similar home for emergencies.
- Southbury Training School (STS)– there are currently 130 individuals still living at STS.

Each member was given the opportunity to ask questions. Some of the questions that were asked were: how to access the seminars. Shannon explained that they are available on the DDS website. There was also a question about the COVID vaccine only being given to individuals over 50. At the present time, there are not official policies in the Department concerning the vaccine. Each person is to obtain their own vaccine through their physician or a pharmacy.

Ms. Simon reiterated that staffing remains an issue of concern. There are families being forced to quit their jobs to care for their family members. Mr. Bergamo shared that he is still pursuing a paid caregiver option that was made available during COVID. Fritz shared that there is something in the way the waiver was written is the reason we cannot continue this practice. He will be sharing more information from his research with CO with Mr. Bergamo. There was discussion on how one caregiver gives up their guardianship and then they are able to be paid as a caregiver. Also CFC supports were briefly touched on.

There was a question on the number of beds at the medical respite unit in Lower Fairfield. Shannon said it would be 5-6 beds. At present, we are trying to staff with LPNs so an opening date is not yet known.

There was a question on individuals being left in the emergency departments. At present, we don't know of any individuals that are sitting in any emergency rooms waiting for assistance.

#### 6. NEW BUSINESS

Marina explained how a group of three moms and one person who works for an agency from Westport saw the need for more social and activity recreational activities. They created a social group called Club 203. She invited the Council to share this information. It is a monthly activity open to all. The first event was a DJ Dance party at the local Art Center called Mocha. The event was huge success with 110-120 in attendance. There is a fee of \$75 a year or \$10 per session to drop in. Information available on a good search.

#### 7. OLD BUSINESS

None.

#### 8. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

#### 9. NEXT MEETING –

- October 20, 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 4:55 pm.***

Respectfully submitted by:

Eunice B. Rivera  
Executive Secretary, DDS West Region