

**DDS West Region  
Advisory Council  
MINUTES  
Thursday, October 19, 2023  
Via Microsoft Teams  
4:00 p.m.**

In attendance: Attendance: Sue Bastien, Charles Bergamo, Marina Derman, Gil Kellersman, Shannon O'Brien, Arlene Steinfeld

Guest: Adrianna Ramirez (CT Family Support Network)

- **Call to order** - Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Council voted to call the Meeting to order at 4:05 pm
- **Review of Minutes** – Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Council voted to approve the Minutes of September 21, 2023.
- **Chair's Report:** Mr. Bergamo shared that he sits on the Connecticut Council for Developmental Disabilities as the Vice Chair that Council. The Council is working through Bill 5001 which was passed. The Council is charged with giving their position on certain aspects of it. One of the aspects is moving a person's diagnosis from an ID to an IQ. He shared that other states have taken on the DD Act definition. The group is also asked to provide feedback on the Developmental Disability Act of other states that have separated out IQ from autism or certain IQ based diagnosis from autism (i.e. Massachusetts). Feedback is due by December 1<sup>st</sup>. They are also reviewing the paid family caregiver which allows a legal guardian to be paid to take cover of their family member. Mr. Bergamo feels that DDS has been misinterpreting the Medicare/Medicaid rules that applies to older people/older children. He explained his position on his interpretation. He shared that he will be contacting Krista to further explain why he feels that family members of older individuals (22 year and older) should be allowed to be paid caregivers. He said that there will be an opportunity for public comment and then it has to be approved by CMS.
- **Regional Director's Report:**
  - Caregiver Initiative: Shannon reported that DDS is no longer calling the Caregiver Initiative the Elder Care Initiative because some people found it offensive. It's currently opened to parents and caregivers that are 65 and older. We have 219 people in the West Region on this list. In the West Region only 5 people are currently expressing an interest and Shannon will be following up with Case Managers to see

why families are not taking advantage of this opportunity. A question was raised if the age number would be lowered if families in this age bracket don't show interest in the funding. Shannon explained that last year the number was lowered to age 62. However, she's not sure if the same thing will happen this year.

There was a brief discussion on why families might not be participating in the Caregiver Initiative. The issue might be around finding staff. Marina shared the link for rewarding work. It is a website for individuals seeking employment to work with our individuals.

STEP: DDS has had quite a few meetings on STEP. This is DDS' initiative to move people into less restrictive settings. The Commissioner has done a lot of open forums available to all DDS stakeholders. The region has done virtual office hours where people can just jump in online and share ideas or just want to listen to what's going on.

Case Management Positions: Case management positions in the West region are filled. An additional position was added to our helpline to deal with the workload in that division. That unit is very busy.

- **Old Business**: Medicare Caps: At a previous meeting, Marina had inquired about Medicare caps. Shannon told Marina that she was able to track down some information. She will be sharing it with her but she cannot elaborate on this because we do not administer that program. Marina explained that she looked into her question and was able to obtain some information. At this point, asset limits will remain the same. Side bar information: On July 1, 2024, the funeral benefit paid under TFA will increase from \$1350 to \$1800. On October 1, 2024, Husky C income limit increasing to 105% of the federal poverty level.

- **Mary Pat DiCarlo, Director of Strategic Workforce**

Mary explained that she's been working in the DDS field for a very long time. She was previously in the private sector. She has been with DDS for about two months. She was previously Vice President of Adult Services at the Kennedy Collective. She explained that the Commissioner approached her to come on board with DDS and look at the workforce crisis. This is a problem that many private providers are facing right now. Her focus is on the private providers and how to assist them with recruitment and retention.

She also shared that she has been working with the Office of Workforce Strategies and the Department of Labor to look at different ways that DDS can engage, underemployed or unemployed people to do trainings so that individuals can work for the private providers as Direct Support professionals (DSP).

She also said that they are focusing on the Human Services career pipeline. As part of House Bill 5001, the legislature is calling for a Human Services career path for people to look at. Shannon inquired about the training Academy in the South Region. The question was if they've had more success because they have that training Academy and how they recruit some of their employees. Mary Pat shared that there has been some success and they are looking to possibly expand this training academy to other parts of the state.

There was some discussion about the teacher shortage and staffing in that area comparing it to the shortage in staffing at DDS. The lack of good childcare is affecting the workforce tremendously. In addition to a lack of staffing, is the wages that staff are being paid. It is not considered a living wage, so people are not interested in taking these types of jobs. Mary Pat explained that this should be explored further.

Public Comment:

Adrianna Ramirez stated that she agrees with Mary Pat DiCarlo and explained that families are struggling to maintain staff. She said some individual's use this job as a stepping stone and this is unfortunate because it has an impact on the families who form bonds with the workers and have to start all over again when their DSP leaves their position.

- Meeting Adjournment: Upon a motion duly made and seconded the meeting adjourned at 4:50pm

Respectfully submitted by:

Eunice B. Rivera  
Executive Secretary  
DDS West Region