

Meeting Minutes: East Central DHHS Advisory Committee, 05/17/2022

Date: 05/17/2022, 4:30-6:30 p.m.
Minutes prepared by: Jeanne Kolo-Johnson
Location: Virtually on Zoom

Attendance

- Members
 - Michele Isham
 - Suzanne Iwainat
 - Diane Schiffler-Dobe
 - Dan Tupy
- Absent: Linda Brobeck, Melinda Brown, Amy Hebert Knopf
- Captioner and Interpreters
 - Michelle Remer, DHHS Interpreter
 - Maria Dively-Rodriguez, DHHS Interpreter
 - Megan, Veritext Captioner
- DHHS Staff
 - Diane Leonard, DHH Specialist
 - Jeanne Kolo-Johnson, Lead DHH Specialist
 - TJay Middlebrook, Regional Services Supervisor
 - Dan Millikin, DHHS Director
- Others Present:
 - Darlene Zangara, Executive Director, Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing
 - Christy Leach, Consumer Directions, Inc.

Agenda

- Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules
- Land Acknowledgment Statement
- Acceptance of January 18, 2022, Meeting Minutes
- Regional Update Report
- Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program
- Regional Needs and Gaps

- Old Business (if applicable)
- New Business
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) Updates
- Announcements: All members
- Next Meeting Date

Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules

Diane called the East Central Advisory Committee (AC) meeting to order at 4:32 p.m. She sent the agenda, January 18, 2022 meeting minutes, regional update report, presentation handouts, and other publications to members by email a week before the meeting. For a copy of these items, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.

Land Acknowledgment Statement

Diane read the Land Acknowledgment Statement.

Acceptance of January 18, 2022, Meeting Minutes

Diane Schiffler-Dobe made a motion to accept the January 18, 2022, meeting minutes. Michele Isham seconded the motion. The minutes were accepted as written.

Regional Update Report

- Diane sent the regional update to members prior to the meeting. Members had no questions about the report.
- Diane explained the regional office has re-opened and she is working from the office using a hybrid schedule. She will work from the office two or three days a week and from home on the other days. Staff will work with people on an appointment only basis. The office is closed on Fridays.

Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program

Updates

- The TED program is producing a video targeting people who have physical and speech disabilities. Once the video is done, the TED program will share it with different organizations state-wide.

- Staff have returned to the office. Specialists provide home visits as needed. They also do presentations and booths.
- A TED Specialist position will be posted for the NE region, hopefully within the next week. Four TED Specialists will provide services statewide. Each region will add counties, and the regional boundaries will change for the TED Program specialists.
- The TED Program will host a virtual meet and greet on June 9 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. They will announce this event via GovDelivery.
- The TED Program has new promotional flyers targeting individuals who have physical and speech disabilities and who are members of the Latine and Black communities. The Latinx flyers are also available in Spanish. Promotional posters for the Latine and Black communities have been developed. Materials are also available in the following languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Kurdish and Nepali and Somali.

Minnesota Relay Feedback

- One AC member asked how many people use Minnesota Relay services; it seems to be becoming obsolete. Dan Millikin responded. Although the need for relay services has declined, rules require that it be available. Minnesota Relay Service also contracts with CapTel for speech-to-text and some TTYs.

Regional Needs and Gaps

- A member shared an experience with a local health care provider who postponed a surgery due to a lack of an interpreter. The member expressed a desire to go ahead with the surgery rather than rescheduling to wait for an interpreter, but the health care provider denied the AC member the opportunity to do so. The member did not know when the surgery would be rescheduled. This member felt the health care provider did not consider their needs. This situation highlighted two needs in this region: a need for more interpreters, and the need to educate the health care provider.
 - Another member asked if video remote interpreting was an option; it was not.
 - The member offered to use captioning on their phone, and this, too, was denied.
 - The member wrote a letter of complaint. Diane also offered to assist the member if needed, for further action.
- When needs for interpreter subs for schools are posted, only about 25% of those requests are filled. Further, it can cost between \$500 and \$700 a day to hire a sub interpreter through Sorenson Interpreter Agency. The educational co-op works with Sorenson Interpreter Agency and with an interpreter who works for this agency. Many interpreters work at call centers and there are interpreter shortages in the schools.

- Another member shared that their son, who uses an interpreter, went without an interpreter sometimes for several days because no subs were available.
- Students refuse VRI because they have had too much time watching screens due to the pandemic.
- The committee discussed the pay rate of educational interpreters, as well as the federal reimbursement rates for schools who must pay for interpreters for students. Dan Millikin also mentioned the Central Accommodation Fund used by the State of Minnesota to pay for accommodations for state employees as a potential model to address this issue.
- A second AC member described issues in their district where a position is posted, they receive no applicants, and then they need to use an agency to fill the position. Interpreters fill the need through the agency because they receive higher pay that way.
- A member raised the question of what steps can be taken to address the issue. Diane asked what enrollment in interpreter training programs currently looks like. Numbers have declined due to the pandemic. In addition, Dan described a comparison ASLIS is conducting as part of their grant work. They are comparing the state of interpreting in Greater Minnesota to the Twin Cities metro area. The information should be available soon. Part of this grant does incentivize living in Greater Minnesota by encouraging ITP students to do an internship in Greater Minnesota. This can then lead to the student staying in Greater Minnesota to work.
- Jeanne added the grants are designed to increase capacity in Greater Minnesota. They include Mentoring to Excellence, free workshops for interpreters working in Greater Minnesota, and mental health interpreting program.
- Michelle added Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf just completed a survey and collected 670 responses on the state of interpreting in Minnesota. Results should be available in the fall.

New Business

- The legislative session will end soon. The session has not impacted DHHSD significantly. DHHSD worked to help DHS' efforts to define and expand language surrounding telehealth. DHHSD worked to make sure the word "video" is included in the definition of telehealth services so video platforms can be used for reimbursable services. Medicare did not reimburse services provided through video platforms. DHHSD has also encouraged the inclusion of support service providers (SSPs) and interpreters in the frontline workers for Hero Pay, but that has not been completed yet.
- Cheryl Blue, a specialist who has worked for DHHSD for 33 years, most recently in the Northeast region, has retired. Her position will not be filled immediately.

- DHHS's budget remains stable. DHHS experienced no budget cuts, but due to inflation and the increases in conducting business, a lack of budget increases could create issues in upcoming years. Grants and community-based services have not been impacted.

Guest Speaker, Christy Leach, Consumer Directions, Inc. (CDI)

Christy shared information about the Deafblind Consumer Directed Services (DBCDS) program and the Deafblind Technology & Training Access (TTAP) program. Diane sent handouts to AC members before the meeting.

One member asked if younger children and students can apply to DBCDS, TTAP and I Can Connect. Christy explained the family needs to first make sure the school is not required to supply the equipment. If not, they can apply to these programs for services. There are not age limits. Christy can provide people with Heather Anderson's contact information if they have questions about the I Can Connect program.

The member also asked if the equipment provided by the I Can Connect program can be used for things other than telecommunication. The equipment must be needed for distance communication but can be used for other things. The I Can Connect program would not provide training on the other things, but Christy's program would provide training for those things.

Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) Updates

- The board will meet in person for the first time in two years.
- Advisory board members are encouraged to sign up to receive the Commission newsletters.
- The Collaborative Experience Conference will take place next November. This conference is for parents or professionals serving students who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing. They are still looking for proposals for the conference.
- The Commission is hosting a deafblind panel on May 24.
- The Commission is working on the ADA virtual celebration which takes place on July 26.

Announcements: All members

- Minnesota Hands and Voices is returning to some in-person events and will continue to do some virtual events. One of the in-person events will include the popular Como Zoo event.
- Minnesota Hands and Voices is still looking for a parent guide to serve the Somalian community.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in September. It is unknown whether it will take place in person or virtually.

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