

Meeting Minutes: East Central DHHS Advisory Committee, 01/18/2022

Date: 01/18/2022, 4:30-6:30 pm
Minutes prepared by: Jeanne Kolo-Johnson
Location: Virtually on Zoom

Attendance

- Members
 - Linda Brobeck
 - Amy Hebert Knopf
 - Michele Isham
 - Suzanne Iwainat
 - Dan Tupy
- Absent: Melinda Brown, Diane Schiffler-Dobe
- Captioners and Interpreters
 - Michelle Remer, DHHS Interpreter
 - Maria Dively-Rodriguez, DHHS Interpreter
 - Jayne, Veritext Captioner
- DHHS Staff
 - Diane Leonard, DHH Specialist
 - Jeanne Kolo-Johnson, Lead DHH Specialist
 - TJay Middlebrook, Regional Services Supervisor
 - Sarah Maheswaran, TED Program Administrator
- Others Present:
 - Amy Perron, System of Technology to Achieve Results (STAR) Program

Agenda

- Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules
- Land Acknowledgment Statement
- Acceptance of October 26, 2021 Meeting Minutes
- Regional Update Report
- Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program
- Regional Needs and Gaps
- New Business
- Guest Speaker
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) Updates
- Announcements

- Next Meeting Date

Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules

The East Central Advisory Committee (AC) meeting was called to order at 4:31 pm by Diane Leonard. The October 26, 2021 meeting minutes, Regional Update Report, STAR Program PowerPoint and agenda for today's meeting were distributed via email. For a copy of these items, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.

Land acknowledgment statement

Diane read the Land Acknowledgment Statement. Staff acknowledge the statement is only the beginning to our equity work. Contact Jeanne Kolo-Johnson at Jeanne.kolo-johnson@state.mn.us with questions.

Acceptance of October 26, 2021 meeting minutes

Dan Tupy moved to accept the meeting minutes as written. Amy Knopf seconded the motion. The minutes were accepted as written.

Regional update report

- The Regional Update Report was sent to members prior to the meeting. There were no questions or comments regarding the report.
- A virtual chat will be held on February 3, 2022 to familiarize people with what Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD) can do for people. This is a new kind of event for DHHSD, and the division hopes to host more events like this. Interpreters and CART will be provided.

Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program, Sarah Maheswaran

Updates

- The TED program has a new application design. In the past the program description and the application were combined. The two have been separated into two documents. Applications can be sent to people upon request. The documents are also available on the DHHSD website:
 - [What is the TED Program](https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Public/DHS-4005D-ENG) (<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Public/DHS-4005D-ENG>)
 - [TED Program Application](https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Public/DHS-4005-ENG) (<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrver/Public/DHS-4005-ENG>)
- Staff continue to work from home and are not able to do home visits. Staff are trying to provide training for consumers about their equipment either over the phone or through video to consumers or family members. There are staff members in St. Paul who enter the office once a week to process applications. Once specialists determine eligibility and identify appropriate equipment for consumers, the vendor ships the equipment directly to the consumer.

- The TED Program now provides advanced wireless devices, or iPads and iPhones. The advanced wireless program began last July. These devices include apps that are preinstalled by the vendor. Specialists determine whether a consumer needs an iPhone or iPad, and whether they can use the device or have support to learn how to use the device prior to giving the device to the consumer. They may provide the consumer with a device that better meets their needs. A request for proposals will be posted soon to expand the program to include Android devices.
- TED Program specialists would like to provide virtual presentations; if you know of agencies who might be interested, have them contact Sarah.

Minnesota Relay (MR) feedback

- Sarah commented that some consumers may notice a delay in answer times; this is related to COVID and staffing shortages. Diane has noticed the same thing with Video Relay Services (VRS).

Regional needs and gaps

- A question was raised about whether there are support groups in the community for people with hearing loss. There is a group at the Whitney Senior Center in St. Cloud that meets monthly. The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) can also be a good resource. The DHHSD Mental Health Specialist may also provide support.
- Another question was raised about whether DHHSD can work with and provide information to people who have age related hearing loss. DHHSD does provide services for older adults, including those who live in long term care facilities. Diane provided information also about the Aging Eyes Initiative Program, in which DHHSD partners with State Services for the Blind (SSB) to provide free equipment for individuals who are 55 or older, do not work and have a combination of vision and hearing loss. Diane will also provide information about the Deafblind Consumer Directed Services Program. Dan Tupy asked if Diane could speak with the Ombudsmen about DHHSD services; this can be done virtually.
- Sarah asked for member experiences with automatic speech recognition (ASR) because some of the new caption phones include ASR technology. Maria, DHHSD staff interpreter, shared information that research shows ASR does not provide equal access. She will share an article with Sarah. A committee member shared her personal experience that Google Transcribe has been very helpful, but she notices background chatter interferes with accuracy. Sometimes Google Transcribe cannot differentiate between speakers if other people are speaking in the background.

New business

- Introduction to TJay Middlebrook, Regional Services Supervisor – TJay Middlebrook replaced Marie Koehler as the Regional Services Supervisor. Prior to coming to DHHSD, he worked as the ADA Coordinator for the City of St. Paul. He supervises DHH Specialists statewide and will work out of the Golden Rule Building in St. Paul when staff return to their offices.
- Budget and legislative updates – The budget remains stable. The legislative season starts on January 31st. DHHSD is not proposing any new legislation.

- The Return-to-Office timeline – There is no definitive date for a return to the office for DHHSD staff. Staff continue to provide services from their homes using video platforms, phone calls, emails, and other ways to communicate.
- Staffing – Dan Millikin, DHHSD Director, and TJay are working together to post the Information and Referral (I&R) Specialist position as soon as they are able. The person who was handling I&R and administrative work left the division temporarily.
- Membership –
 - Members whose terms ended in the last year, or whose terms will end this year will be asked if they would like to continue in their position and will receive a letter verifying the continuation of their terms. Also, when handbooks were updated two years ago, members were asked to sign forms acknowledging that they had read and understood the handbook. If they did not return the signed form, they will be asked to do so now.
 - Dan Tupy has become an official member of the East Central AC. Welcome.
 - The East Central AC has an opening. If anybody knows someone who is interested in joining the AC, have them contact Diane Leonard. People who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing or late deafened and who live outside of St. Cloud are encouraged to apply. If they do not have hearing loss, but provide services for people who have hearing loss, they may also apply. DHHSD would like to have a diverse AC to reflect the community they serve. The West Central AC is currently recruiting three members.

Guest speaker, Amy Perron, STAR Program

Amy Perron shared information about the STAR Program and answered questions. A PowerPoint was shared prior to the meeting.

Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) updates, Michele Isham

- The legislative agenda has been posted on the MNCDHH website and the board has voted on the priorities for the upcoming legislative session. The Commission hosted four different types of focus groups to determine what the needs are for each of those communities. They used that information to develop legislative priorities.
- St. Anthony Main Theater, an independently owned movie theater in Minneapolis, agreed to provide open captions for all shows. Parkwood Movie Theater in Waite Park provides a selection of on-screen open caption showings every Sunday.
- The Commission will begin work to help community members understand the election process, given the upcoming elections in November.

Announcements: All members

- Minnesota Hands and Voices is hiring more parent guides for the metro area and more cultural guides, specifically a Somali guide and a Hmong guide. In person events are being planned in addition to a full calendar of virtual events for families.

Next meeting

Diane will send an email to members to set the date for the next meeting in May.

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 pm.

