

Meeting Minutes: Southeast DHHSD Advisory Committee, 10/1/2021

Date: 10/1/2021, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Minutes prepared by: Natalie Regenscheid
Location: Virtually on Zoom

Attendance

- Members
 - Lloyd Ballinger
 - Ridge Euler
 - Matthew Heidenwirth
 - Annette Peters
 - Chandra Petersen
 - Sonny Wasilowski
 - Ashley Worthen-Galuska
- Absent: Wes Brandenburger, Melissa Cummins
- CART and Interpreters
 - Michelle Remer, DHHSD Interpreter
 - Maria Dively-Rodriguez, DHHSD Interpreter
 - Lisa, Veritext Captioner
 - Nicki, ASLIS Interpreter
 - Jenna, ASLIS Interpreter
 - Katy, ASLIS Interpreter
- DHHSD Staff
 - Calla Kevan, DHH Specialist
 - Jeannie Kolo-Johnson, Lead DHH Specialist
 - Dan Millikin, DHHSD Director
 - Natalie Regenscheid, OASI
 - Kristina Anderson, Management Analyst
 - Teika Pakalns, Policy & Planning Specialist
- Others Present
 - Rochelle Garrow, Telecommunication Access MN (TAM) Administrator

Agenda

- Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules
- Land Acknowledgement Statement
- Acceptance of June 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes
- Regional Update Report, Calla
- Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program, Jeannie
 - Updates
 - Minnesota Relay (MR) Feedback

- Regional Needs and Gaps, Calla
- New Business
 - Position updates
 - FY22 and FY23 budget updates
 - Regional office facilities
 - Legislative audit updates (in compliance)
 - AC and Town Hall meetings
 - Telehealth services
 - Mental Health Program and operations, Jeannie
 - Tele-communications Access Minnesota, Rochelle
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) Updates, Chandra
- Announcements: All members
- Next Meeting, Calla

Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules

The Southeast Advisory Committee (AC) meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Calla Kevan. Members and guests were welcomed. The June 4, 2021 Southeast AC meeting minutes, Regional Update Report, Telecommunications Access Minnesota (TAM) PowerPoint and the agenda were distributed via email prior to the meeting. For a copy of these items, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.

Land Acknowledgement Statement

“We collectively acknowledge that we are located on the traditional land of Indigenous people that once and still is occupied by the Ojibwe, Dakota and other Native peoples from the time immemorial. These lands hold great historical, spiritual, cultural and personal significance for these Native nations. We recognize, support and advocate for the sovereignty of these nations in this territory and beyond. By offering this land acknowledgement, we affirm tribal sovereignty and will hold ourselves accountable to the American Indian people and nations.”

- September 30, 2021 was Orange Shirt Day. Orange Shirt Day was established in 2013 by Phyllis Webstad, a residential school survivor, to honor those Indigenous children who were taken from their homes and placed in boarding schools. They were then shamed and abused for their heritages. Thousands of children died in these schools. The last boarding school did not close until 1996. Orange Shirt Day is intended to pause and reflect on the treatment of Indigenous people.

Acceptance of June 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes

- Sonny moved to accept the meeting minutes and Chandra seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as written.

Regional Update Report, Calla

- Sonny shared the following:
 - Expressed his appreciation for the work the division has done related to communication access in hospitals and clinics thus far and asked that language deprivation be addressed.
 - The Faribault Deaf Club is slowly resuming in-person events and asked that Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD) provide more meetings, events, and training about hearing loss.
 - Hopes that meetings will move to an in-person format again in the future. Dan responded there were plans to have more in-person AC meetings, however, due to the Delta variant, in-person meetings were suspended until further notice. This goes for all Community Supports Administration staff under the Department of Human Services (DHS). Sonny shared that communications about whether services are being provided in person are confusing. Information about when a return to in-person services will go into effect is hard to find. Dan responded that DHHSD provides information as they receive it and will try to provide information through the GovDelivery system.
- Matthew, a new AC member, asked where the SE AC meeting is typically held when the committee meets in person. Calla responded that it is at the CareerForce location in Rochester.

Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program, Jeanne

Updates

- The TED Program is distributing iPads and iPhones, within a limited budget. When a consumer applies to the TED Program, a TED specialist reviews their application to determine if they are eligible to receive an iPhone/iPad. Current TED clients do not need to reapply, but they do need to reverify their eligibility to receive an iPhone/iPad.
- Sarah, the TED Program Administrator, is in the process of submitting a request for proposal (RFP) to expand the TED Program to provide android devices in addition to iOS devices.
- In the past, 3G network devices were provided to consumers. They will be discontinued at the end of the year. TED specialists are contacting TED clients to replace the 3G devices with 4G devices.
- Virtual presentations are being offered to service providers and consumers to explain more about the services provided by the TED Program.
 - Sonny shared that he had a meeting with Sarah and Kirk, a TED specialist in the southern region. Sonny noted there is not much happening in the southern region as it concerns the TED Program, he would like to see more outreach done.

Minnesota Relay (MR) Updates

- No feedback provided.

Regional Needs and Gaps, Calla

- Interpreter Requests
 - Lloyd shared his frustration that interpreter requests are going unfilled and would like to hear from other members whether they've noticed a gap in finding interpreters. He shared his personal experience of requesting an interpreter for a medical appointment 7 weeks in advance of the appointment. No interpreter was placed for the appointment. Lloyd asked if a task force can be created with DHHS to address this gap in the community.
 - Sonny has noticed this gap as well. The metro region has an around-the-clock system for interpreters in health care settings, but this is not available in rural areas. Allina Health, Mayo Clinic and Northfield Clinic are all big healthcare systems, yet Northfield Clinic seems to be the only medical facility that will take the initiative to reach out to Metro interpreters to make interpreting arrangements. Allina Health and Mayo Clinic wait until a regional interpreter can be booked to schedule an appointment, which in turn, delays the appointment for the patient.
 - Ashley asked if data is being collected to reflect the reason interpreters are not being provided. Is it because there are no interpreters available in the southern region? Do the agencies and medical providers not have the knowledge they need to make the requests? Are they resisting paying mileage? Having data can help determine what the root of the issue is, which can better address this need.
 - Ridge shared that there are not a lot of interpreters available in Rochester and unfortunately, many interpreters travel from the Twin Cities to Rochester.
 - Nettie talked with other interpreters in the region and discovered three issues:
 - One of the repercussions of COVID-19 is many interpreters have left community interpreting and gone to video relay services (VRS). There is not a VRS center in the southern region. If agencies can work together to create a VRS center in the southern region, many of the interpreters that reside in the southern region can remain in the community rather than commuting to the Twin Cities to work in the VRS center. This can also provide more availability for the interpreters to have a mix of VRS and in-person services.
 - The applicant pool of educational interpreters is small and there are not enough people interested in being ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters.
 - Interpreters in the southern region are getting older. Outreach to young adults interested in becoming interpreters could fill the job gaps.
 - Chandra added that providers are avoiding hiring interpreters due to the cost of reimbursing interpreters for their travel. Also, most providers don't know there is more than one interpreting agency, so they often stick with the one agency they know, which can hurt the consumer.
 - Matthew admitted he does not have much experience with interpreting arrangements and asked if it is an issue of the number of interpreters available or funding. He asked who pays for the interpreter. Dan responded, the ADA (Americans Disabilities Act), requires any provider, organization, etc. to provide accommodations. However, if an employer has fewer than 15 employees or if providing an accommodation would cause an undue hardship, that provider

does not have to provide accommodation. Nevertheless, agencies need to be able to budget so they can provide accommodations.

- Dan explained that in Minnesota, there is designated funding to cover communication access for employees of state agencies and there are several grants that are designed to improve capacity in Greater Minnesota, including interpreter trainings throughout Minnesota. In the Twin Cities, there is higher pay and more opportunities for interpreters to fill their schedules, which is why this grant is available for greater Minnesota. The current grantee is ASLIS (American Sign Language Interpreting Services), and they provide internships statewide to students with hopes to expand the pool of interpreters.
- Lloyd commented on Nettie's suggestion about having a VRS center in the southern region. He shared his experiences working in VRS and VRP (video relay provider). VRP does not receive funding from the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) whereas VRS does, which is why VRS is more available. Often, funding is the issue for interpreting services. Lloyd also commented that some interpreters would accept certain jobs due to personal preference or turn down jobs due to conflicts of interest.
- Sonny noted the following gaps and needs:
 - Schools are communicating with parents via text messages. However, Deaf parents have provided schools with their VP (videophone) numbers, and so there have been barriers in the way parents receive information from schools. Education is needed for school districts about hearing loss and communication access.
 - Different avenues of communication access need to be available and advocates from the community should be involved in ensuring accessibility is met across the board. Some of these options are not being met, such as interpreters, and all options need to be available.
 - ASL was only recently recognized as an official language and so is not always recognized as a language. When ASL is the native language in the home, parents need to verify for school districts that ASL is their children's first language and English is their second language.
 - Language deprivation is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Lloyd shared that on behalf of VRI (video relay interpreting) problems, he reached out to National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and other organizations and discovered there is a task force set up that includes a technology expert. VRI requires a strong internet connection, and many medical facilities are concerned about firewalls and privacy issues, which can be a problem for setting up VRI services. While it is nice to have VRI services, it is not always appropriate based upon equipment, equipment size, environment, and accessibility.
- Nettie shared she would like to support Lloyd's suggestion of setting up a task force to dive deep into the gaps of interpreting services and how to move forward.
- Chandra raised the issue of accessible Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes in greater Minnesota. ThinkSelf provided virtual driver's ed training and ABE statewide during the pandemic but is resuming in-person services. The Minnesota Department of Education does not provide reimbursement and funding for ABE provided virtually; they will only provide reimbursement for in-person ABE. This is an issue because, due to the impacts of COVID-19, people across greater Minnesota were able to access ABE classes, English, ASL, citizenship, driver's education and other classes virtually. Now, consumers who live in greater Minnesota are again unable to access these classes because there are no providers in Greater

Minnesota who provide accessible services for people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, and late-deafened, and there is now no funding for virtual classes.

- Chandra brought up a need for quality ASL classes in high schools that pique the interest of youth. Provision of advanced classes, rather than just providing the basics would maintain student interest.
 - Nettie added (in the chat box) that Region 10 and Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf is going to try to partner with high school American Sign Language classes to try recruiting students and having them shadow interpreters on campus. They hope to see this happen in the spring. This experience would give students the opportunity to see what jobs that are available for signers and interpreters.

New Business

- Position updates: DHHSD is hoping to wrap up the interview process and hire a Regional Services Supervisor soon. Teika Pakalns is now the Policy and Planning Specialist; her former position as the Program Planner will be posted soon.
- Fiscal Year (FY) 22 and FY23 budget updates: COVID-19 impacted the division's budget, resulting in reductions but no impact on services. There are three positions that have not been filled and will remain parked. Some fleet vehicles will be eliminated. The biggest concern for budget cuts would be for FY23 because bigger reductions than expected will be required.
- Regional office facilities: There are currently five regional offices, two of these offices (Rochester and Hibbing) are satellites. There is discussion of subleasing the Mankato office to another state agency. Rochester remains a satellite, and Hibbing staff will continue teleworking and will later work from the Duluth office as needed.
- Legislative audit and updates: The Office of Legislative Audit (OLA) selected several state division's programs, including DHHSD's, to audit. There were recommendations made for improvements and corrections for the TED program and for grant program compliance. In the past year, DHHSD made these changes and is now fully compliant. DHHSD will continue to practice the measures implemented as a result of the audit.
- AC and Town Hall meetings: AC meetings will continue to be virtual until further notice. DHHSD is revisiting long-term plans of community and town hall meetings throughout the state. Town Hall Meetings will focus on one or two main topics in each region. Once the pandemic subsides, it will be easier to determine what things will look like for in-person meetings.
- Telehealth services: DHS is studying the provision of telehealth services in relation to equity and accessibility. DHHSD has used video platforms to provide services for a very long time and are ahead of the rest of DHS, and so Dan, DHHSD Director, is participating in the committee tasked with studying this issue to provide insight and guidance. He can provide a strong perspective regarding accessibility for people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, and late-deafened. Proposed best practices for telehealth services addressing internet connectivity, equipment recommendations, the use of varying languages, etc. are being considered.
- Mental health program and operations: due to limited time, Jeannie will send an email to members with this update. For this information, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.

- Telecommunication Access Minnesota: Rochelle went through the PowerPoint explaining services, programs and common questions received over the years. For a copy of this PowerPoint, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.
 - Lloyd disagreed that the internet is a public utility. Rochelle clarified that the TAM and TED program do not receive federal funding from the universal service fund. The TAM fund oversees the Minnesota Relay and TED program, along with other programs. There is a surcharge on telephone access lines, but these funds do not come from the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), it comes directly from telephone service providers. The PUC is there to approve TAM's budget for access lines, not provide funds.

MNCDHH Updates

Chandra will send an email to all members with updates from MNCDHH. Some brief updates:

- There are two RFPs that will be published soon; one recruits hard of hearing community members to help with promotional information, outreach, and engagement. The second RFP is for a citizen advocate video campaign series which provides tips and resources for people who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing to advocate for change.
- Items from the 2021 legislative session will be continued through 2022. Items include: establishing an interim licensure board, captioning in public places, local accessibility grant for local governments, defining CDI (certified deaf interpreter) in the education law, defining deafblind intervenors in the education law, and fixing statutes to include early intervention services at Metro Deaf School (MDS). New items being considered for the 2022 legislative session may include: ASL teacher licensure, language acquisition tracking for early intervention, insurance coverage for hearing aids for adults, requiring telecoil education by providers, access to truck driving schools for people with hearing loss, communication access protocols in emergency situations, parent accommodations for IEPs (Individualized Education Plan), mandating impact statements prior to legal sentencing, braille labels on prescription bottles and communication facilitators for phone calls.
- MNCDHH has two new staff members: Danelle Gournaris is the Collaborative Plan Program Director and Alicia Lane-Outlaw is the Government Relations Director.

Announcements: All members

- There was not enough time left in the meeting to address new announcements from all members.

Next Meeting

Calla will send an email with several dates to determine next meeting date.

Meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.