

Meeting Minutes: Northwest DHHSD Advisory Committee, 01/19/2022

Date: 01/19/2022
Minutes prepared by: Jeanne Kolo-Johnson
Location: Virtually by Zoom

Attendance

- Members
 - Linda Fairbanks
 - Kathryn Rose
 - Maureen Lilleby
 - Lori Vigesaa
- Absent: Susan Anderson, Micki Curtis, Elizabeth Merz, Cynthia Ruiz
- CART and Interpreters
 - Michelle Remer, DHHSD Interpreter
 - Maria Dively-Rodriguez, DHHSD Interpreter
- Jayne, Veritext Captioner
- DHHSD Staff
 - Jerry Geist, DHH Specialist
 - Jeanne Kolo-Johnson, Lead DHH Specialist
 - Dan Millikin, DHHSD Director
 - TJay Middlebrook, Regional Services Supervisor
 - Sarah Maheswaran, TED Program Administrator
- Others Present: Les Fairbanks

Agenda

- Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules
- Land Acknowledgment Statement
- Acceptance of October 6, 2021 Meeting Minutes
- Regional Update Report
- Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program
- Regional Needs and Gaps
- New Business
- Presentation, Therapeutic Services Agency, Lori Vigesaa
- Minnesota Commission for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) Updates
- Announcements
- Next Meeting Date

Call to Order/Introductions/Handouts/Communication Ground Rules

Jerry Geist called the Northwest Advisory Committee (AC) meeting to order at 10:03 am. Members and guests were welcomed. The October 6, 2021 Northwest AC meeting minutes, regional update report, and agenda were distributed via email prior to the meeting. For a copy of these items, contact dhs.dhhsd@state.mn.us.

Land Acknowledgment Statement

Jerry read the Land Acknowledgment Statement. Staff acknowledge the statement is only the beginning to our equity work.

Acceptance of October 6, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Linda moved to accept the minutes. Maureen seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Regional Update Report

- AC members received the update report prior to the meeting; Jerry summarized the report during the meeting. Dan added DHHS would like to be known as the “one stop” center for hearing loss related to information and resources. The publications and resources being created currently are part of that effort.
- DHHS Virtual Chat – DHHS will host a statewide virtual chat on February 3rd from 6:30-8 p.m. This is the first virtual chat and staff will share information about services DHHS provides.

Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program

Updates

- The TED program has a newly designed application. In the past the program description and the application were combined. The two have been separated into two documents: a program flyer and an application. These are available on the DHHS website at:
 - [What is the TED Program?](https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4005D-ENG) (https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4005D-ENG)
 - [TED Program application](https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4005-ENG) (https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-4005-ENG)
- All specialists continue to provide services from their homes. A staff person goes to the office at the Golden Rule Building in St. Paul once a week to process applications. TED specialists then receive applications electronically and determine eligibility and communicate with clients via telephone, video phone or email. Once they determine what kind of equipment is needed, the vendor will ship it directly to the client or family member. Unfortunately, staff cannot do home visits.
- The advanced wireless distribution program began in July and TED specialists can now distribute iPads and iPhones. These devices have pre-installed apps specific to disability group and built-in security

features. The assessment process used to determine whether a person qualifies to receive an advanced wireless device is strict to ensure a client has the technical skills needed to use the device or access to training on how to use the device. A request for proposals (RFP) will be posted soon to expand services to include Android devices.

- TED Specialists can provide virtual presentations. If providers are interested in a presentation about the TED Program, they should contact Sarah.

Minnesota Relay (MR) Feedback

- No feedback was provided.

Regional Needs and Gaps

- Kathryn noted the need for support for chemical dependency treatment and collaboration with the deaf community. Mental and chemical health problems are on the rise, and there is a lack of services for those in need. Fairview's closure has put a stress on the programs that are available; there are long wait times during which people disappear and consequently do not get the treatment they need. When they do get in, they are the only Deaf people in the program. The State of Minnesota needs to recognize this is a collaborative issue and needs to provide support to address the issue. Dan responded the state has received American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, some of which will go to the behavioral health services. ARPA funds may be used to address issues that have arisen because a program closed due to the pandemic so this may be a way for funds to be used to address chemical and mental health issues for people who are deaf. This is a valid concern that has been brought up several times. Kathryn acknowledged the support Deaf Can receives from behavioral health services but urged DHHSD to provide support and to collaborate in those efforts; without that collaboration the issues do not get solved. Dan will follow up with Kathryn.
- Linda noted services are difficult for people to access because of distance and because there are no on-site services available. For example, interpreters always must travel a distance to get to appointments, and there is no DHHSD office that is open, so people feel there are no services available. Providers check for interpreter availability before scheduling appointments to meet client needs rather than scheduling based on the client need. DHHSD will work to share information with the community that services are available even though the office is not open.
- Lori supported Kathryn's comments and added equal numbers of deaf and hard of hearing youth use drugs and alcohol as their hearing peers, but once they start to use drugs and alcohol, they use more, more often. Their addiction becomes stronger, faster. There is a need for drug and alcohol education for youth who are in rural communities.

New Business

- Introduction to TJay Middlebrook, Regional Services Supervisor – TJay Middlebrook is the new Regional Services Supervisor for statewide regional services. He began on December 1st. He has experience as an ADA coordinator and with program development. Welcome, TJay.

- Budget and legislative updates – The budget is stable. There was a small decrease before the pandemic but a surplus from the federal government leveled the decrease out and the Northwest Region is doing well. There are not any legislative impacts on DHHS.
- Return-to-Work timeline – The timeline for staff to return to their offices continues to be delayed. When that date has been set definitively, DHHS will make an announcement. If emergencies occur, staff will travel to address them, but this only occurs on a case-by-case basis.
- Natalie, an Office and Administrative Specialist Intermediate (OASI), has moved to a new position. She answered phones and handled information and referrals (I&R). A position will be posted soon.
- 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.

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

- The last meeting centered on what bills MNCDHH will support. The following bills are being supported:
 - The interpreter licensure board bill.
 - A bill requiring hearing aid providers to educate their clients about telecoils.
 - A change in statute to create more flexibility in who sits on the MNCDHH board. This will give the Commission the ability to recruit people with relevant lived experience and create more variety from which the Commission can recruit.
 - An applicant or employee accommodation needs bill, which requires employees or job applicants be part of the discussion about their own accommodation needs.
 - A bill requiring closed captions in all public places.
 - A bill that adds certified deaf interpreters (CDIs) to the educational interpreter law to ensure it is an option for students.
 - A bill for local government website accessibility.
 - A bill that requires schools to provide accommodations for parents during the IEP planning process.
- If the following bills are introduced by allies, the Commission will support them:
 - A bill that customers receive label information for prescription bottles in either braille or large print when requested.
 - Funding for the Metro Deaf School for birth to 3 years programming.
- The following are long term action items that do not currently have legislative solutions:
 - Hearing aid affordability
 - Communication access during emergencies
 - ASL teacher licensure
 - Visual/tactile safety device affordability
 - ASL fluency for deaf and hard of hearing teachers

- Language acquisition tracking
- Service Support Provider (SSP) availability
- Section 8 housing prioritization for people with communication barriers.

Announcements: All members

- Lori announced she and a colleague, Karen Sheldon, will present at the national American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA) conference in New Mexico about providing mental health services in rural Minnesota.
- Lori also shared Therapeutic Services Agency hired a skills worker for the Northwest region. This staff person is working on her graduate degree in clinical counseling and will eventually become a clinical trainee so she can share Lori's case load.
 - Linda asked how the program is funded. TSA uses third party billing, and a DHHSD grant covers services and activities not covered by insurance.
 - Lori also explained they collaborate with schools to identify locations to provide their services.
- Linda shared information about open captioned movies on Sundays in Fargo. Jerry clarified that in the past a deaf person requested specific movies be captioned but now the theatre chooses two movies to be captioned on Sundays without community input.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in May; Jerry will send an email with potential dates to members to set the date.

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

