

DS State Program Standing Committee (SPSC)

7/16/20

Skype Meeting

Attendees

Committee Members: David Ballou, Joy Redington, Max Barrows, Anne Bakeman, Lyn Ujlaky

Guests: Lee Reilly, Pam McCarthy (VFN), Karen Topper (GMSA), Jason Sibley (SCC), Tonya Mason (HC), June Ward (CAP), Kara Artus (TII), Hannah Eye (Heartbeet), Ann Schumacher (HC), Ray Hathaway (SCC), Trudy Booska (SCC), Ross Almo (ARC), Cheryl Thrall (LSI), Jess Moore

State Employees: Joy Barrett, June Bascom, Chris O'Neill, Susan Aranoff, Selina Hickman, Lisa Parro, Jeff Nunemaker

Review Agenda and Minutes

A roll call was completed. The DS State Program Standing Committee (SPSC) meeting minutes from the June 18, 2020 meeting were reviewed. Joy made a motion to approve the minutes as written, Lyn seconded, and the motion was passed.

SPSC Virtual Meeting Recommendation

A request was made asking virtual meeting participants to please try to participate in the meeting with the video on and where there is a good internet connection. Participants coming and out of meetings due to connection issues is distracting and can take time from the meeting. The facilitation of a virtual meeting is easier when there are good connections. If someone loses connection, time will be given at the end of the agenda for them to speak on an issue they have missed. If a participant is not speaking, putting themselves on mute will help cut down on background noise and will also enable the meeting to run smoother.

SPSC Member Check-in

SPSC members spoke of new hobbies and how they are doing during this time – Max has a new hobby calling for birds with blue tooth; Joy has a new hobby foraging; Selina's young children are

wearing bear whistles due to bears in the neighborhood; and Dave spoke of his experience getting a COVID test. 😊

DDSD Director Updates

The guidance that has been issued for COVID-19 has not changed very much. The stay at home order has been extended to August 15th and we continue to need to wear masks, wash hands, and to keep our physical distance. The emotional toll from COVID-19 has been increasing and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) is seeing a lot more people in crisis, not just from the presence of serious mental illness, but due to the impact of COVID-19 on everyone's mental health. It is good to remind ourselves of the hard work that is involved, and the remarkable job everyone is doing. In its memos about essential services, DAIL has tried to make it clear that services are essential when they are related to physical health and safety, as well as for mental health.

Anyone may contact the Division at any time if there are issues with services that they are not able to resolve with their case manager. Lisa shared an e-mail after the meeting with the division phone number.

- For COVID-19 concerns that your agency is not able to help you with - DDSD phone number:
Voice: (802) 241-0304
For [Telecommunications Relay Service](#): Dial 711

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development has been providing guidance to businesses during COVID-19, such as making sure employees wear masks if they are working, and seating ground rules for occupancy. If anyone is concerned that a business is not doing what they should be doing, a complaint may be filed online. (Contact information sent after the meeting)

- You can file a complaint about lack of compliance with COVID-19 business requirements through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development:-
https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=O5O0IK26PEOcAnDtzHVZxp8VolcMV9NNU0QyG_vdGAVUN1pLSTdOMERRR1dXOVpZMDBZUEtNVlhXMi4u

An inquiry was made about the importance of tracking what has been lost during COVID, and if there was a way to track service hours that are not being provided. DAIL has been trying to figure out how to do this; however, the DS system lacks encounter data, which makes this task challenging. The division is working on how to collect this information.

Watch for future townhall meetings; DAIL will be scheduling more.

Workforce, Pre and Post COVID - June Bascom

Information about the workforce, pre and post COVID, will be presented at the August SPSC meeting; however, June presented some initial information. About 25% of the people who were

working in March were still working in July. Another 20% had been furloughed and have since returned to work. A little over 50% of the workers were still furloughed. Only a few people have lost their jobs.

This data includes the people who were working and who are supported through the employment program at an agency, it does not include the people who were waiting for a job placement that was stopped due to COVID and it does not include people who are working independently, not through the employment program, and have lost their jobs.

Some people are remaining on furlough or have lost their job because many businesses are not ready to re-open again, businesses are unstable because of the number of people coming into the business, and many businesses have closed. There are a number of workers who don't want to go back to work right now, they want to stay on furlough as they don't feel safe in returning to the workplace. There are some workers who lost their job, but it was not due to COVID. The question was raised about workers who have returned to work but have reduced hours and how widespread are loss of work hours.

Agencies are doing risk assessments of work environments to see if they are safe for individuals to return to work, they are doing regular check-ins with people who have returned to work, have work plans in place, are doing trainings for safety, and are providing a lot of 1-1 assistance to be sure it is a safe environment.

There are many organizations helping people to apply for unemployment, agency staff, family members, VT Legal Aid, advocates, etc. There have been ABLE account trainings provided so when unemployment funds are received, an individual will know what to do with the extra income, so it does not affect their benefits in the future. However, this is not a coordinated approach that can be tracked. There is not a lot of data about people who are applying for unemployment. If someone applies, it is likely they will be eligible for unemployment.

June will do some further research to find out if the agencies are able to confirm if everyone that has been working has met with the agency and has done a risk assessment and a work plan, and will obtain the final data and put it in a written form for everyone to review for next month. If there are any questions, contact June Bascom, June.Bascom@Vermont.gov or Lisa Parro, Lisa.Parro@Vermont.gov.

A suggestion was made about Vermont having more freedom, quality of life in relation to quality of service, and that Vermont may be able to offer some of their information nationally to assist in areas where this is not the case.

Nationally the University of Minnesota is asking questions of direct support workers, primarily with agencies. The information can be found at: <https://publications.ici.umn.edu/community-living/covid19-survey/covid-19-survey-initial-results>

GMSA, DD Council, DS Agency Updates

Green Mountain Self Advocates (GMSA) recently made a new booklet about returning to work with a decision tree about returning to the community. It is being reviewed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) before its official release.

The weekly Zoom meetings have turned into a skill share with teaching being done by self-advocates.

GMSA created a new video about stimulus checks.

The employment assessment and community support assessment guidance are very complex, and everything is constantly changing. The designated agencies are trying to figure out how to continue to connect with people, how to stay connected as the rules change. They would like ideas from self-advocates about what things would be helpful over the winter, when the weather turns cold, while doing the community assessments. Agencies are trying to determine if people are getting too 'Zoom fatigued' or if they should continue to create new things online.

While the agencies are using Zoom, there is also the piece of availability and who to call at this time. Some agencies have a phone tree, which is helpful and a safety connection for people who live on their own. Many individuals may be reached through social media, Facebook, as they are spending a lot of time posting things.

Specialized Community Care (SCC) Re-Designation

The Mission Statement for Specialized Community Care: The purpose of SCC is to serve and support persons with cognitive disabilities in the communities in which they choose to live and to promote their full and successful integration into the mainstream of society. In particular, we will serve persons requiring a high level of personal attention with services modeled after those provided to non-disabled people.

SCC is a small agency specialized in serving challenging individuals with unique needs. They serve around 75 individuals.

Jeff Nunemaker, from the DDSD Quality Management Team, reviewed the information in the Agency Designation Report, Specialized Community Care (SCC) FINAL REPORT, dated July 16, 2020. There was no further discussion or questions asked about the report or of the agency. After the meeting, the SPSC members in attendance were sent the voting sheets. The DAIL Commissioner was notified that the SPSC voted to Re-Designate Specialized Community Care.

DS Payment Reform

DS Payment Reform paused most of the activities in March due to the State of Emergency. DAIL is in the planning stage of what will happen with payment reform moving forward.

Minimally, the encounter data (information about the services to individuals), which is needed for multiple purposes and is not currently available; will be moving forward at this time. Guidance for agencies about how to set up the system to report encounter data in MMIS instead of services reports was just sent out. There were some trainings about encounter data; however, these stopped due to COVID. Some agencies had started to use MMIS before the State of Emergency; however, agencies were in the process of working on switching to electronic health records so some agencies were going to work on the encounter data afterwards.

Related to DS Payment Reform, but not exactly part of Payment Reform, are the different ways the State provides payments to the agencies. Currently the agencies submit a spreadsheet for each individual receiving Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), a complicated manual process for both the agency and the State. A lot of work must be done for adjustments, so there is a lot of administrative work and cash flow issues. For the last year, the agencies and the State have been discussing a different way to pay the agencies. On July 1st, a new method that streamlines the billing began, instead of using a daily billing rate, there is a monthly billing rate. This is budget neutral and does not change the individual service plan or budget; there is no change to the individual. It is a formulaic conversation on how agencies are paid which will save time for agency and state. There was a public comment period about this change, in which only one comment was received. This new process will be monitored for any issues that may occur.

More information about DS Payment Reform will be sent out after some additional planning is done internally.

Wrap Up and Comments

The DD Council reported that the State has received a large amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) which is in the process of being distributed out to people with DD. The Council is working to distribute kits of masks and hand sanitizer.

At the June meeting, it was reported that there were 70,000 cloth masks in the operations stockpile which was approved to be distributed to Vermonters in need. About two weeks ago, these masks were sent to DAIL advocacy and partner organizations to help distribute them where needed. Selina sent the SPSC a list of the organizations who received the masks.

Vermont Family Network and Vocational Rehabilitation is providing some free virtual workshops for youth and young adults. <https://www.vermontfamilynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Free-Virtual-Workshops-for-Youth-Young-Adults-flyer.pdf>

Joy made a motion to adjourn, david seconded the motion and it passed.