

DS State Program Standing Committee (SPSC)

September 16, 2021

Meeting Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Committee members: David Ballou, Susan Yuan, Bethany Drum, Dawn Danner, Karen Price, Cheryl Thrall, Max Barrows, Ed Place

Guests: Rep. Topper McFaun, Julie Cunningham, Kara Artus, Karen Topper, Lehana Guyette, Shasta, Marie Lallier, Rachel Seelig, Josh Smith, Jess Moore, Gloria Quinn, Tracy Fisher, Jen Hayes

State Employees: Jessica Bernard, Lisa Parro, Susan Aranoff, June Bascom, Kirsten Murphy, Clare McFadden, Jeff Coy, Joy Barrett, Chris O'Neill, Jeff Nunemaker, Nicole Marabella, Cheryl Wilcox

Role Call and Review Agenda

A roll call was completed, and the meeting agenda was reviewed.

Agency of Human Services (AHS) Taskforce on the Workforce

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) Taskforce on the Workforce has representation from the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Vermont Department of Health (VDH), Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL), Department of Corrections (DOC) and representatives from the specialized service agencies. Cheryle Wilcox, DMH, and Anne Bilodeau, Health Care and Rehabilitative Services of Southeastern Vermont (HCRS), are the Co-Chairs.

The workgroup is collaborating about different ways to impact the workforce. The working document with the areas of focus will be sent to the SPSC after the meeting. (This document was sent to the SPSC the afternoon of 9/16/21.) Salaries is a focus, as well as staff coming from out of state who cannot find housing, student loan debt or loan repayments, tuition reimbursement, possibly childcare assistance, and possibly the flexibility on work locations. The Taskforce has been hearing about the workforce issues with home providers and family respite workers. There are many ideas on the table and pieces to consider.

The Taskforce is highlighting the different things agencies are doing in all the areas of services and are highlighting the issue of people having to wait for needed services.

The Taskforce has researched what other states have been doing, and they have some ideas about strategies on marketing. The workforce issue is a huge priority with the leadership, and while there will be other things that arise, the Taskforce plans to keep the workforce issues on the forefront. They welcome any input.

Some thoughts and concerns the meeting attendees voiced:

- Vermont Care Partners (VCP) have pulled together data on the turnover in the agencies. Since 2020, staff turnover went from 23% to 45%.
- Will do whatever is needed to support the Taskforce. Maybe pilot things and see what sticks. Need a relief to the problem.
- The Frances Foundation, who serves 20 of the highest needs population, has to close their doors.
- It's not just agency staff, but home providers and family respite workers; most families need to recruit through the community not the agencies. Collective of what all people need.
- Lincoln Street raised their base rate for support workers, but it is still not enough. People are burning out. Last week three staff were out due to exposure to the Delta variant; this wreaks havoc with the work schedule.
- Having all the incentives Vermont has to offer in one location would be very helpful.
- Heard about some companies putting people up in a hotel or ski areas, offering housing as a benefit. Maybe use this as housing for people with services for shared living.
- Hire Vermonters not contractors.
- The State of Vermont needs staff positions to be able to do what needs to be done.
- Really important to pause any initiatives as possible right now, such as payment reform, and focus on the basics.

Meeting Minutes, SPSC Member Check-In

The SPSC meeting minutes from the August 19, 2021 meeting were reviewed. Max requested the "Teams Meeting" in the title be changed to "Meeting held Virtually on Microsoft Teams." David made a motion to accept the meeting minutes with the change, Sherry seconded the motion, and the motion was passed.

Using safety measures, everyone at Lincoln Street (LSI) got together for an enormous picnic and had a wonderful time, despite the rain. They went through 55 pizzas! People are still talking about it.

The DD Council partnered with VCP for a celebration day on September 14th to honor direct service professionals. This was a very good virtual event with 76 participants and a lot of good stories.

DDSD Director Updates

DDSD Staff Recruitment

Information was sent out on Friday about the temporary changes of management positions in DDSD. Clare has moved into the DDSD Director position until her retirement on 11/19/21. Jessica Bernard has been hired to fill the Deputy Director of Payment Reform position that Clare has been in. Clare is working with Jessica as she transitions into her new position and will work to train a new candidate for the DDSD Director position before she leaves the State.

There have been two rounds of recruitment for the DDSD Director position, and in each round the position was offered to an applicant but they each declined. The position has been reposted for recruitment.

DDSD Assistant Director, Amy Roth, is also retiring on 11/19/21. The DDSD Assistant Director position was posted for recruitment and interviews were held; however, a candidate was unable to be secured. The DDSD Assistant Director position has also been reposted for recruitment.

The DAIL Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Bard Hill, Jessica Bernard, and Clare are meeting weekly to strategize recruitment for people to apply, locally and nationally. The current structure of the division is also being reviewed to determine what is needed in the longer term to stabilize the work in DDSD and make it more sustainable, as well as working on succession planning. This group is also planning for the “what ifs,” such as no candidate for a position/both positions.

Since Jessica has moved into the new role as Deputy Director of Payment Reform, her position of DDSD Senior Auditor and Program Consultant is under recruitment.

All positions are on the State of Vermont Human Resources website.

https://careers.vermont.gov/search/?createNewAlert=false&q=ddsd&locationsearch=&optionsFacetsDD_location=&optionsFacetsDD_department=

If you know of any good candidates, please encourage them to apply on the State system. Amy, Clare, and Monica White are available to talk with anyone who has questions about the positions.

Meeting attendees voiced concern about how much institutional history is being lost with the retirements and people who helped create the system and taught the values, both for DAIL and the DS Directors. The loss of institutional history over the last couple of years has been profound. DAIL was asked about broadening the small strategic planning workgroup to include stakeholders and their perspectives; look at what is happening to the DS system and how to bring it back together.

State System of Care Plan

DAIL is in the process of updating the State System of Care (SOC) plan, which also requires the updating of regulations. The update of the plan typically takes a minimum of 8 months, but usually a year, of internal planning, crafting proposed changes, public input, formal process for regulatory changes approved by legislature, comment period, and change of regulations. July 1, 2022 is the goal for updating the current changes. DAIL is having regularly scheduled meetings to do this work. Information will be shared in the not too distance future.

Rep. McFaun inquired about the plan addressing some of the issues in bill H.243, An act relating to the Working Group on Services for Adults with Autism. Clare has not yet had a chance to get updated on this since returning to the Director position, but will work to do this.

Conflict of Interest in Case Management (COI)

The main conduit of communication between the State and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), for renewal of the 1115 Global Commitment to Health waiver, is through the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA). A consultant is assisting DVHA with this work. DAIL is not included in all the conversations with CMS. Clare will need to revisit the communication that DAIL has regarding conflict of interest in case management (COI) to get and update of the status and will bring that information back to the SPSC.

DAIL was asked about CMS' urging to have DAIL talk with stakeholders. The communication that has occurred is that COI will happen through the global commitment waiver, and the proposal for the renewal of the 1115 waiver has been sent to CMS and is in the negotiation period. There are two separate authorities at CMS, one for 1115 waivers and one for 1915 waivers, each with different requirements. Vermont is trying to obtaining guidance from CMS about whether Vermont can continue in the direction of a choice model which was proposed for DDS. The renewed 1115 waiver is supposed to be in place by January 1st, so there should be more information soon.

DS Stakeholders wanting the choice model and concerns about DVHA being removed from the work was voiced. As well as the concern about not being able to push this forward. A question of using FMAP funding for strategies for mitigation of COI, such as an ombudsman, peer services, going to a case manager outside of an agency was also voiced, and having a place to track if people are happy with their services. If DAIL moves forward with peer support and navigation, Susan is willing to assist.

GMSS Re-Designation

The review for re-designation at Green Mountain Support Services (GMSS) took place in May.

GMSS has paid a lot of attention to taking care of the staff, partner in the community to make sure people know services and support is available, and there was a strong performance by the

service coordinators in health and wellness, home support in the community, and attention to individuals. A sincere appreciation to GMSS for getting people the services they needed during the pandemic.

Over the last couple years, GMSS nursing has continued to excel, and they continue to improve and do a great job. GMSS did a great job looking at peoples' health, and to provide advice and training during the pandemic.

DAIL was impressed with the breadth of training and the culture of personal and professional development at GMSS.

While GMSS provides some great services, in the last 4 years where GMSS has failed to solve issues. Service coordinators were frustrated about the agency supporting them, which in turn has resulted in people having to wait for services to improve. There is an issue with GMSS teams not responding to DDS inquiries, which impacts services and adds some concern to the quality of services.

To help enforce the 24-hour turnaround time on e-mails, Josh stated that he has been explicit with staff about communication being important and information in writing is needed. Josh feels this was a snapshot in time and that things have gone to a culture of oversharing information. He also wanted to share that their agency is the first agency to be recognized nationally and they have had no service coordinators leaving during the pandemic.

The SPSC vote about the recommendation to the DAIL Commissioner will take place via e-mail by SPSC after the meeting. The recommendation from the vote will be passed onto the DAIL Commissioner who will make the final decision.

DS Payment Reform

At the last SPSC meeting, a letter that was sent to DAIL from Vermont Care Partners (VCP) about concerns with the SIS-A was reviewed. DAIL leadership would like to meet with VCP to discuss the letter before having a conversation with the SPSC. The meeting for this discussion had to be rescheduled to 11/3/21; therefore, DAIL is not able to provide a response to the SPSC yet. DAIL will bring the feedback, response about how things will move forward, and continue the conversation at the October SPSC meeting.

Other things that are occurring with the SIS-A: After the assessment is completed, a report is now being sent to the people who participate in the assessment and to the agency case manager or designated contact person who is a team member. PCG, State contractor, developed a survey for feedback and that they just started sending the survey to people who participate. The survey information will be provided to DAIL to use for improvement strategies. There are ongoing meetings with PCG to address any issues that arise. There are a lot more assessments being scheduled. DAIL would like an ongoing dialog about what is happening; anyone can reach out to

Jessica Bernard, Jessica.Bernard@Vermont.gov and there is a link on the DDS website for feedback as well, <https://ddsd.vermont.gov/projects-initiatives/dds-payment-reform/dds-payment-reform-standardized-assess-workgroup>

DAIL just received a video from AAIDD explaining the SIS in plain language. The link to this will be on the DDS website soon. Any resources DAIL is able to post, it will be posted; there are some items that cannot be posted due to copyright issues.

Some input by meeting attendees:

- Do not feel the assessment process is in line with ethics, no harm to people served and in equitable manner.
- Are the reports going back to the family, family-friendly? And do they include scores?
 - There are scores for each category and then a total score.
 - Jessica will follow-up with PCG to find out if the report is family-friendly and how this is communicated.
- DAIL is asking for all data PCG has collected and will be reviewing it.
- Can the SPSC see a copy of the survey that is being sent out.
 - Jessical will request a copy of the survey.
- When meeting is held to discuss SIS-A, please note that VT Disability Law Projects supports a pause on the SIS-A.

Encounter data

There have been a number of glitches with the implementation for encounter data, some are due to the MMIS system. DAIL meets with the agencies every two weeks and discusses any issues that arise. The assessment and encounter data are the priority; the payment model is being put on hold.

Updates from GMSA, VCP, DD Council

Green Mountain Self Advocates (GMSA)

Max has just completed presenting a 12-week course on person centered planning for 41 self-advocates (another 9 self-advocates did the first 4 training sessions.) Self-advocates learned how to:

1. Get ready for their person-centered planning meeting;
2. Think about what a good life means for them;
3. Invite more people to come to their meeting;
4. Get ready to lead their own meeting;
5. Be a mentor for other self-advocates who want help at their meetings.

The training was funded by the DD Council with a match of money earned by GMSA through the consulting we do.

The next step is to secure funding to hire self-advocates to work as peer mentors with other self-advocates who want help preparing for their PCP meetings and during their meetings. They will also be training about what PCP means.

GMSA understands that peer projects have been identified as one of the areas AHS would like to support and so are hoping that GMSA can secure funding from the extra Medicaid money that the state received from the COVID recovery act.

DD Council

The DD Council is in the final stages of filing their new 5-year plan. The work plan, as well as videos, about moving forward is on the DD Council website. The plan will be voted on 9/30/21, then filed. <https://ddc.vermont.gov/plan-and-projects/5-year-state-plan>

There are SEEDS grants available through the DD Council. SEEDS grants are nonrenewable awards that provide \$5,000 to \$10,000 for small project support to help meet goals and objectives. <https://ddc.vermont.gov/plan-and-projects/seeds-grants>

Identify possible agenda items for SPSC next month

- SIS-A update after meeting

- Mitigation strategies for COI, and if DAIL recommended this in the budget

- DDSD Recruitment

- Finish the process to get members on the committee