



**Tompkins County**  
**COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD**

Tompkins County Whole Health  
201 East Green Street  
Ithaca, New York 14850-5421

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Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee

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**Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee**  
**Tuesday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 10:00 a.m. via Zoom**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Minutes Approved**  
**10/14/2025**

**Present:** James Beaumont; Jeffrey Boles; Sheila McEnery; Nancy Saltzman; Sally McConnell-Ginet; Walaa Maharem-Horan;

**Excused:** Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; Khaki Wunderlich; and Allison Weiner-Heinemann

**Unexcused:**

**Guests Present:** Jamie Kelly, OPWDD; Madison Saufley, Southern Tier Connect; Greg Kadlecik, RACKER; Marlene Tagliavento, RACKER; and Aaron Bronzon, Unity House

**Staff:** Karan Palazzo, LGU AA

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The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by James. Sheila moved to approve the July 2025 minutes, seconded by Sally; all were in favor.  
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**Privilege of the Floor:** None

**Announcements/Correspondence:** James announced that Amy Durkin has been hired as their new Chief Operating Officer, and Darlene Podolak has been promoted to Executive Director at Unity House. It was noted that the eligibility age for individuals aging out of or staying in school until the age of 22 or the end of the year of their 22nd birthday varies by district, and Nicole will provide further clarification.

**DISCUSSIONS**

- **Transition Toolkit Webinar** - The Transition Toolkit webinar is scheduled for September 10, 2025, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Registration is required.
- **Direct Service Provider (DSP) Week** – Direct Support Provider (DSP) Week 2025 will be celebrated from September 7-13, 2025. This week is dedicated to recognizing the vital contributions of DSPs in supporting individuals with disabilities. James asked agencies how they will celebrate their DSPs.
  - Racker will be giving out gray T-shirts with the Racker residential logo and a heart design that says "DSP, I'll be there for you."; Providing \$15 Dunkin' gift cards to all DSP staff; sending daily emails to the organization featuring collages and pictures of different DSPs; shifting from food-based appreciation events to gift cards and shirts to ensure all staff, including overnight and off-shift employees, are recognized.
  - Challenge will be providing food and snacks for staff; giving out gift cards to everyone; organizing a luncheon for staff, although not everyone may be able to attend at the same time; ensuring that all staff, regardless of their schedule, receive recognition and appreciation.
  - Springbrook will be hosting a Food Truck and an Ice Cream Truck for their residential staff; provide gift cards to staff and invite their Binghamton staff to participate in the festivities.

- Unity House will be giving out special gifts to staff (the specifics are kept secret until the week); hold longevity awards for staff who have reached milestone years of service; provide food and organize fun activities, such as Unity Games, a chili cook-off, and a Family Feud event; offer chair massages for DSPs, with sign-ups available in both counties; host themed dress-up days (e.g., favorite sports day, tropical Tuesday, Unity House gear day); extending appreciation activities throughout the month, not just the week; make special efforts to include self-direction staff who are less frequently on-site.

James will research how to join events, email lists, and updates with OPWDD.

- **Mozaic Social Worker** - James shared that Jennifer Goodman informed him that Mozaic has hired a social worker, and referrals are welcome.
- **Eligibility Administrative Directive Memorandum (ADM) Regulation Updates from OPWDD** – The ADM does not affect individuals already receiving services, but it makes it more difficult for new enrollees to obtain waiver services.
  - The new ADM clarifies eligibility and enrollment requirements for the OPWDD waiver.
  - To enroll in the waiver, applicants must demonstrate a need for a waiver service (such as day habilitation, community habilitation, residence, respite, or employment services). Services like FSS (Family Support Services), FRR (Family Reimbursement Respite), and IDGS (Individual Goods and Services) alone do not meet the requirement for waiver enrollment.
  - The ADM primarily affects new applicants coming through the “front door” and does not impact individuals already receiving waiver services.
  - If someone is already in the waiver and stops using all waiver services, they may be removed from the waiver, but re-enrollment is possible and not an overly burdensome process.
  - The ADM revision also addresses the need to exhaust other available resources before applying for the waiver, which can be particularly challenging for younger children and families without Medicaid.
  - There are safeguards in place: if someone has significant needs that require care management services (even though care management itself is not a waiver service), this may help them remain eligible for the waiver.
  - The ADM was revised in the summer and specifically addresses the process for exhausting other resources and eligibility for younger children.

Marlene shared her experiences overseeing the Family Support Services (FSS) reimbursement fund. She finds that there are challenges and confusion to accessing waiver services for families, especially those with younger children, and there is a need for clearer communication and understanding of the updated regulations.

Madison manages children's eligibility, including those without Medicaid, through a process known as “parental deeming.” Families without Medicaid must first apply for waiver services and justify their need before qualifying. She noted that getting Medicaid waivers for children under 12 is difficult; approvals are rare and require extensive documentation of failed supports and services. She has only secured waivers in a few severe cases involving younger children. She also handles requesting and scheduling CANS assessments, which often have long wait times unless urgent. Overall, she finds the process challenging for families, especially with younger children, due to strict requirements and lengthy procedures.

Jamie clarified that self-direction (an alternative to traditional services) was included in the ADM revision, although it was not explicit.

James said they are developing an instructional roadmap or steps to assist parents in accessing helpful informational resources for their children.

CES (Children and Youth Evaluation Services) has been a valuable resource for families, helping them access Medicaid and other services, but it is expected to end, with only one more year remaining. Further research is needed to determine what will happen after CES ends, and the group plans to share any new information as it becomes available.

**New Rates for Community Habilitation Posted** – James reported that the rate for community habilitation (com hab) in upstate New York increased from \$12.15 to \$12.46 per 15-minute segment, which is \$49.84 per hour. This rate increase was part of the New York State budget changes approved in April. Respite rates differ; despite Tompkins County having a higher cost of living, it has one of the lowest respite rates compared to neighboring counties with lower living costs. Lower rates may negatively impact the availability and quality of respite care for families in areas with higher costs. The subcommittee plans to seek clarification from OPWDD about how these rates are determined.

The group discussed two important assessments used by OPWDD, which are required for service planning and can impact eligibility, budgets, and agency reimbursement rates.

- CAS (Coordinated Assessment System): This is an assessment for adults (over 18) that evaluates an individual's needs and helps determine eligibility and service levels for OPWDD programs.
- CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths): This is a similar assessment for children (under 18), used to determine eligibility and service needs.

Agenda topics for 2026 – James and Jeff welcome input and ideas from the subcommittee for 2026 agenda topics.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

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**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is  
Tuesday, October 14, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.**