



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
Tuesday, October 14th, 2025, 10:00 a.m. via Zoom
Meeting Minutes

Minutes Approved
1/13/2026

Present: James Beaumont; Jeffrey Boles; Sheila McEnery; Nancy Saltzman; Sally McConnell-Ginet.

Excused: Khaki Wunderlich, Walaa Maharem-Horan, and Allison Weiner-Heinemann

Unexcused:

Guests Present: Jamie Kelly, OPWDD; Madison Saufley, Southern Tier Connect; IYB; Marlene Tagliavento, RACKER; Christopher Kaiser, RACKER; and Anne Seepersaud; LifePlan; Aaron Bronzon, Unity House

Staff: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; Karan Palazzo, LGU AA

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by James. Sheila moved to approve the September 9, 2025, minutes, seconded by Sally; all were in favor.
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Privilege of the Floor: None

Announcements/Correspondence: The BOCES Open House held last week had a good turnout. Jennifer Goodman relayed that there is a teacher's meeting every Monday, where various agencies and service providers gather to share information and connect with families, particularly parents of students with disabilities. It offers parents the chance to learn about new and existing services available through BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) and other providers. This event is seen as a valuable opportunity for outreach, helping families become aware of resources that support individuals with developmental disabilities as they transition from infancy, through school, and beyond.

There is a regional monthly Zoom meeting for school mental health professionals, including social workers, counselors, and psychologists, as well as provider agencies. Its purpose is to connect these professionals to discuss resources, support, and strategies for working with students who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The meeting helps share information, coordinate services, and ensure that students and families can access the support they need through their schools and community providers, and is facilitated by Emily Wemmer and Brandy Remington.

DISCUSSIONS

- **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) and Coordinated Assessment Systems (CAS)** – These assessments are crucial for service eligibility, planning compliance, and organizational funding within the developmental disabilities system. CANS is for individuals under 18 years of age who are being assessed for services and supports through OPWDD. CAS is for individuals over 18 years old who are being assessed for services and supports through OPWDD.

- They are required by OPWDD to gauge an individual's abilities and needs
- Having up-to-date CANS/CAS assessments is necessary for accessing new services or authorizing service changes
- OPWDD uses these assessments to ensure individuals receive the appropriate level of care and support.
- Agencies' reimbursement rates may soon be based on the average CANS/CAS scores of the people they serve, reflecting the complexity of needs within their population.
- They provide data for compliance, service planning, and advocacy to streamline care, reduce delays, and improve service quality.

- **\$25 Million Capital Projects for Healthcare for Intellectual Developmental Disabilities** – OPWDD is granting \$25 million to organizations that can expand healthcare opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, especially in regions with limited access to care. OPWDD will prioritize projects related to opening new dental facilities, expanding existing dental clinics, improving physical spaces to better accommodate wheelchairs and accessibility needs, and supporting capital projects in diagnostic and treatment centers, hospitals, outpatient clinics, and other healthcare settings. Jamie added that they are also looking at nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and PTC.

The goal is to address major barriers to dental and healthcare services, such as long waitlists and transportation challenges, and to enhance access and quality of care for people with developmental disabilities.

- **Healthcare Expo** - A Healthcare Expo, hosted by Ithaca College, is focused on graduating high school students and aims to highlight career opportunities in healthcare. Unity House and other organizations were invited to participate, advocating for the representation of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and the importance of educating young people about career paths in the developmental disabilities field. The event provides information about various healthcare careers, including roles that require only a high school diploma, to expand awareness and recruitment for these rewarding jobs.

Dual diagnosis of individuals who have both developmental disabilities and mental health conditions was discussed in the need to ensure they receive adequate mental health care in addition to developmental disability supports. There is rising awareness, improved collaboration among providers, and greater access to counseling and specialized mental health services. Mozaic has recently hired a new social worker dedicated to counseling in Ithaca. There will probably be challenges in service coordination and the vital importance of continued attention to both aspects of care.

Family and Children Services closed several programs—the DAP (Disposition Alternatives Program), Employee Assistance Program, and Open Doors Program. They made these changes to streamline their offerings and focus on becoming more financially sustainable. However, they continue to provide therapy and have improved access to mental health services, especially for those with co-occurring developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

- **Monthly Topics** - Topics people want to discuss in upcoming meetings include:
 - Housing options
 - Employment (including Disability Employment Awareness Month)
 - Youth services (including camp, respite, and self-direction for those under 18)
 - Self-direction services
 - Day programs and available options
 - Community and workforce shortages
 - Transition services for youth
 - Healthcare and crisis services
 - Aging services for those living independently
 - Transportation
 - Respite care options
 - Family Support Services (FSS), including funding, respite, camp, library offerings, and free events

- **Road Map** – James, Jeff, and Walaa are creating a roadmap, a comprehensive guide to help individuals and families navigate the process of accessing services for people with developmental disabilities—from diagnosis through securing support and resources. Developed with input from parents and providers, the roadmap aims to provide:

- A clear, step-by-step outline of what to do and who to contact at each stage

- Specific information relevant to Tompkins County
- Helpful resources not just by agency name, but by position/role, to simplify outreach
- Both a brief, one-page overview for quick reference and more detailed information for those needing deeper guidance

The goal is to make it much easier for families, especially those new to the process, to understand their options and how to get the support they need.

Provider Updates:

OPWDD – Jamie reminded the group about the “Accessing Life” podcast, created by OPWDD employees and featuring episodes relevant to accessibility and services for people with developmental disabilities. There were no other significant new updates from OPWDD beyond topics already covered in the meeting.

RACKER – Christopher’s

- Their annual community celebration, themed "Rooted in Purpose," at the downtown conference center with dinner and a full program.
- Upcoming trunk-or-treat events in Portland and Candor.
- Introduction of a new, free movie series for the community, featuring topics such as “Remembering Willowbrook” and caregiver challenges, with facilitated discussions.
- A new care manager was hired a few months ago

Event details are available on the Racker website, and all programs are open to the public.

FLIC – Jeff shared that they continue to create job opportunities for people with disabilities and encourage their participation in the workforce.

LIFE PLAN – Anne highlighted ongoing work to update and finalize a comprehensive community resource directory. This directory will include IDD, clinical, and community-based providers. They have reached out to many organizations for current information and expect to launch the updated directory soon.

UNITY HOUSE - James updates included:

Efforts to better utilize their mall space outside of regular hours by hosting events like Sunday football gatherings and Monday Night Raw (wrestling) nights.

Initial events have been successful with participants, and they are working to open these activities to people outside of Unity House to foster more community involvement and inclusivity. Plans to put out more information as these programs expand.

➤ **The Developmental Disability Subcommittee will meet on November 18, 2025**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

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**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is
Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.**