



Tompkins County
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

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

Jan Lynch, Chair

Sheila McEnery, Vice Chair

Jennie Sutcliffe, Commissioner,

Harmony Ayers-Friedlander
Deputy Commissioner/DCS

Larry Roberts, Chair
Mental Health Subcommittee

James Beaumont and Jeff Boles, Co-Chairs
Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee

Jacob Parker Carver, Chair
Substance Use Subcommittee

Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee
January 13th, 2026, 10:00 a.m. via Zoom
Meeting Minutes

Minutes Approved
2/10/2026

Present: James Beaumont; Jeffrey Boles; Nancy Saltzman; Walaa Maharem-Horan; Allison Weiner-Heinemann; and Sally McConnell-Ginet

Excused: Sheila McEnery and Khaki Wunderlich

Unexcused:

Guests Present: Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Candi Saxman, Unity House; Madison Saufley, Southern Tier Connect; Amy Durkin, Unity House; Aaron Bronzon, Unity House; Gabriella Ayers, Catholic Charities; Deb Finn, Mozaic; Dave Kudgus, OPWDD; Michelle Gravel, Springbrook; Julie Reid, Prime Care; Jonathan Bacon, Unity House; Ryan Wilcox, Unity House; Christopher Kaiser, RACKER; Courtney Glenn, IYP; Jamie Kelly, OPWDD; Jan

Staff: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; Shannon Alvord, TCWH; and Karan Palazzo, LGU Administrative Assistant

.....
The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by James. Sally moved to approve the November and December 2025 minutes, seconded by Nancy; all were in favor.

Privilege of the Floor: None
.....

Announcements/Correspondence: Jeff announced that March is Developmental Disability Awareness Month. This year's Developmental Disabilities goal is to improve communication and community awareness of developmental disability services in 2026, in collaboration with Tompkins County.

Discussions:

Day Hab and Community Hab (Com Hab) Agency Presentations

Unity House Day Services - Ryan Willcox, Day Services Manager at Unity House, shared that they are focusing on building the program in Tompkins County for Community Hab, making referrals, and making connections. She is not clear why they receive so few referrals in Tompkins County. Com Hab services are constrained by underfunding, staffing shortages, housing/transportation pressures, complex navigation, and broader racial/economic disparities, all of which this group is trying to address through advocacy, workforce data, and better family outreach.

Alliance Legislative Day in February – James explained that it is a coordinated opportunity for DD advocates from across the state to meet legislators, present data, and push a small set of high-priority asks—with your local group planning to bring those messages back and align local advocacy around them. He has been going the last few years and feels it is successful because it keeps issues visible, helps to sustain incremental gains (COLA) and data-driven in Albany, coordinates clear, shared advocacy messages, and feeds back into our local planning, so our community can push in the same direction all year.

Provider Fair Working Group – James is looking for volunteers to join the provider fair working group. There have been **three consecutive years** of a provider/resource fair. It's **open to interested providers and stakeholders** from this DD advocacy group who want to help plan and improve the fair. He thanked Jan, Wala, and Briggs for volunteering.

- Responsibilities include:
 - **Recruiting providers** to host tables (22 provider tables last year).
 - **Coordinating with the county** (previously with Cindy Sloan, now transitioning to work with **Joel** at the county for the benefits/county piece).
 - **Improving outreach** so more families and individuals attend.
 - **Building and maintaining a provider list**, including:
 - “Traditional” services (residential, day, com-hab, etc.).
 - “Side” or **specialty services**, e.g.:
 - Physical activity programs for people with disabilities
 - **Maestro Music** (music therapy)
 - **Open the Lid** and similar community-based services.

Main goals (especially for 2026)

- Make the fair a **regular, routine event** (annual, in the evening to accommodate families).
- **Increase family and individual participation**, by:
 - Getting information out through **as many networks as possible**.
 - Partnering with people like **Walaa**, who will be “instrumental” in reaching families.
 - Fixing last year’s issue where a county communications person left mid-process, and outreach suffered.
- Use the fair to:
 - Foster **networking among providers** (they’ve had good provider-to-provider discussions at the fair).
 - Help families “**fill the week**” with meaningful services by showcasing a wide mix of options.

OPWDD Updates – Jamie shared that updates on the Commission's Task Force on Aging, which supports aging with dignity for people with developmental disabilities. The task force includes subject matter experts, self-advocates, family members, and providers, and will hold panels and information sessions in 2026. The task force does not include housing, which is being addressed by another committee due to its complexity. The next DDAC meeting is on April 21st and encourages community members to attend and provide input.

Health Disparities in Tompkins County – Harmony discusses the local services plan and the importance of understanding disparities in Tompkins County, particularly around racial and ethnic differences.

1. Biggest Disparities: Race and Ethnicity

- The **most pronounced disparities** are **racial and ethnic**.
- **Black residents** in Tompkins County experience:
 - **Higher rates of homelessness**
 - **Higher poverty and food insecurity**
 - **Higher rates of chronic disease, mortality, and preventable hospitalizations**
 - **Worse maternal and infant health outcomes**, including:
 - Lower rates of **prenatal care**
 - **Higher rates of preterm birth and low birth weight**

These are the clearest and most serious inequities identified so far.

2. Social & Economic Conditions Driving Health - Harmony highlighted four major **social determinants of health** that the county is focusing on:

1. **Access to safe, stable, affordable housing**
2. **Economic stability** (including employment)
3. **Nutrition and food security**
4. **Academic performance and school attendance (K–12)**
 - Includes disparities for **youth with disabilities**

Housing is foundational for health.

3. Housing & Homelessness (Key Data Points)

- ❖ **Housing affordability:**
 - **33% of renters** in Tompkins County spend **≥50% of their income on rent**
 - Compared to **26% in NY State** and **24% nationally**.
- ❖ **Rental vacancy rate:** about **3.2%**
 - Very low, which contributes to **high rents** and fewer options.
- ❖ **Section 8 / public housing vouchers:**
 - **2–2.5 year waitlist**.
 - There may be a **freeze** on vouchers; Harmony plans to get more details.
- ❖ **Homelessness trends:**
 - Point-in-time count:
 - **2018:** 91 people
 - **2023:** 273 people
 - **2025:** 155 people (still high, but lower than 2023)
 - Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), unduplicated counts:
 - **Typically, 528–720 people per year (2018–2024)**
 - **698 people already in 2025** at the time of data pull (a high year).
- ❖ **Supportive housing capacity:**
 - Beds increased from **71 (2012)** to **175 (2023)**
 - Dropped to **153 (2024)**.
 - Some of those **losses affect developmental disability housing** specifically.

In summary, high housing costs, low vacancy, long voucher waitlists, and limited supportive housing create **major affordability and stability problems**, which in turn drive health inequities—especially for Black residents and people with disabilities.

4. Workforce Diversity & Health Equity

- The county conducts a **workforce survey** for organizations funded through the **local government unit (LGU)**, and others can opt in.
- In 2025, they are **adding an equity lens**:
- Not just “Do you have enough staff?” but:
 - **How diverse is your workforce?**
 - **What strategies are you using to diversify it?**
- Rationale:
 - To effectively address **health inequities and social health needs**, the **helping workforce must better reflect community diversity**.
 - This applies across mental health, substance use, and **developmental disability services**.

5. Next Steps in the County’s Disparities Work

- This presentation is part of the **Local Services Plan 2025 goal**:
 - Build **shared knowledge** of disparities in Tompkins County.
- Future work (in upcoming meetings):
 - Dig deeper into:
 - **Economic stability**
 - **Food security**
 - **School performance/attendance** (including youth with disabilities)
 - More granular **housing accessibility** (physical accessibility, not just cost)
 - Decide what **additional data** is needed (e.g., around disability-appropriate housing, race × disability intersections).
 - Use this data to guide **local priorities and strategies** (like workforce diversification and service design).

The meeting was adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

.....

**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is
Tuesday, February 10, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.**