


Tompkins County
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

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

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Substance Use Subcommittee

Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee
March 12th, 2024, 10:00 a.m. Via Zoom
Meeting Minutes

Minutes Approved
April 9, 2024

Present: James Beaumont; Jeffrey Boles; Sheila McEnery; Sally McConnell-Gist; Allison Weiner-Heinemann; and Nancy Saltzman

Excused: Cassidy Stanley; Walaa Maharem-Horan; and Khaki Wunderlich

Unexcused:

Guests Present: Kristin Letourneau, IYB; Melinda Sheppard, Southern Tier Connect; Christopher Kaiser, RACKER; Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Anne Seepersaud, Life Plan; and Greg Kadlecik.

Staff: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; Margo Polikoff, RN, CSCN; and Karan Palazzo, LGU Administrative Assistant

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The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by James. Sheila motioned to approve the January 2024 minutes, seconded by Sally; all were in favor.
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Privilege of the Floor: None.

Announcements/Correspondence: Margo shared that "Better Together" will be held on May 11, 2024, at Stewart Park from 11 – 3 pm. James shared that Unity House is planning an evening event at the Foundation of Light, more details are forthcoming.

Discussions

CSE Chair meeting – James reported that most all providers attended the CSE meeting and discussed service options that were available to transitioning OPWDD clients. David Barr suggested having one representative attend and share information with multiple CSE chairs rather than two full events per year. Briggs will be our agency representative at the March 20th meeting and asked if anyone had any handouts or agency information for Briggs to share with the CSE chairs.

James will meet with BOCES teachers and school district counselors to present information and gather feedback on how best to provide information to support students with disabilities. Briggs reported that Bethany met with Jennifer Goodman (TST BOCES) yesterday, during their teachers' pre-meeting and is interested in scheduling with providers (Monday – Friday from 7:45 am to 8:15 am) so the teachers are aware of the information, resources, and services available in preparation for transitioning students. TST BOCE prom is May 10th from 6-8 pm please contact Jennifer Goodman where tabling will be available. Emails will be forwarded with more information.

Jeff suggested a road map of services. Anne will share the updated regional service provider list.

Legislative/Advocacy Day in Albany: James reported that the current OPWDD commissioner is stepping down, but she presented and discussed goals for OPWDD. Alliance and several other organizations made presentations. James appreciated the handouts from the event and shared them on screen, but he will also send them out in an email. He highlighted OPWDD COLA from the past 12 years versus what the CPI indicated inflation is.

2011 – 2023/2024 inflation is up 30.5 % with providers given a 10.% COLA. Providers are earning significantly less than minimum wage, leading to a shortage of over 20,000 direct support workers, increasing the size of groups, and resulting in a reduction in the quality of service. Nonprofit agencies face \$100 million to recruit, retain, and train new direct support professionals. Providers need higher reimbursement rates to attract more staff. State DSPs make \$24.75/hr. vs nonprofit at \$16.48 making a significant difference while the State continues to temporarily close/suspend programs. Providers need a higher rate of reimbursement citing 3.2% as a reasonable request.

Lawmakers in support of the increases questioned how they would be paid, and it was calculated that it was only .000006% of the State’s budget and about 3% of the State's Medicaid budget.

Sheila is concerned about where individuals are going and what are they doing with the closures and reduction in services. James stated that unfortunately some must stay in unideal situations and may experience a crisis based on their circumstances. He is hopeful that data at the county level will prove how unique Tompkins County’s cost of living is in the region versus the rest of Upstate NY. Tompkins County COLA is comparable to New York City.

James met with an OMH data collector to help create a survey to gather precise data from providers on the number of people receiving services in Tompkins County which will prove the struggles to serve clients due to high demand and low staffing levels, despite increased funding for mental health services.

Harmony sits on the Issues Committee of Senator Leah Webb’s office. Ms. Webb is interested in the data collected which will include parts of Broome County and Cortland County to better address the concerns. Harmony believes that in looking at the community as a “System of Care” and advocating for each unique program’s needs (Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, and Substance Use) requires ongoing support.

Provider Fair Update: James reported that the Provider Fair will be held on an afternoon/evening on *June 5th* to accommodate more families with a potential venue at Ithaca High School.

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

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**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is
Tuesday, April 10th, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.**