



**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**  
**January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 10:00 a.m. Via Zoom**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Minutes Approved 2/13/24

**Present:** Jeffrey Boles, James Beaumont; Sheila McEnery; Allison Weiner-Heinemann; Walaa Maharem-Horan; Cassidy Stanley; and Nancy Saltzman

**Excused:** Sally McConnell-Gist; and Khaki Wunderlich

**Unexcused:**

**Guests Present:** Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Jessica Conner, Northeast Pediatrics; Nicole Lucieer, TST BOCES; Greg Kadlecik, TST BOCES; Michelle Gravel, Springbrook; Jamie Kelly, OPWDD; Madison Sauflay, Southern Tier Connect; Pete Cornell, Catholic Charities; Aaron Brozon, Unity House; Jennifer Goodman TST BOCES; Melinda Sheppard, Southern Tier Connect; and

**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 10:03 a.m. by James. Sheila motioned to approve December 2023 minutes, seconded by Allison; all were in favor. had

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**Privilege of the Floor:**

**Announcements/Correspondence:** Jeff and James gave an update regarding the Medicaid transport issues for individuals with developmental disabilities. They are looking to communicate with the County's Chief Transportation Officer, Frank Doldo to discuss the Medicaid cab transportation accessibility concerns brought by Jessica in the last meeting. They will send an email out for those who have any concerns/ issues to be forwarded to the proper channels. They will reach out to Kristen Wells of Gadabout in hopes that she give a presentation on the company and services.

Chris shared that they are moving one bed from Tompkins County to Tioga County, decreasing the beds in Tompkins County to nine beds in the first quarter of 2024 with the approval of OPWDD.

**Discussions**

**Legislative Days in Albany** – On legislative days in Albany on February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, Alliance and mental health organizations/providers will advocate for Mental Health and Intellectual Developmental Disabilities Services. James said that Unity House will be in attendance on both days to meet with legislators to give real-world information and share stories of individuals whom they support. Jeff said he was able to meet via Zoom with legislators in the past. James provided informational links to the meeting - <https://nyalliance.org/meetinginfo.php?id=430&ts=1704374150>

James stressed the importance of parent support groups and sharing information on advocacy efforts. He complimented Walaa on a very active and involved parent support group. Jessica added that Northeast Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine runs a free, monthly online Support Group for Parents of Neurodiverse Youth on the 1<sup>st</sup> Friday of the month from 12- 1 pm; youth do not have to be patients at Northeast Peds. Please contact her at [jconner@northeastpeds.com](mailto:jconner@northeastpeds.com) for the link invite.

**County Legislature Meeting on Empty Houses Update:** James attended the County Legislature meeting to speak on the temporary suspension of services of eight houses in Tompkins County (which some did not know about the closures). He discussed the possibility of having refugees or asylum seekers with work permits come to Tompkins County to work in the human services field to help fill in

the gaps. They were very much interested as Unity House’s Executive Director, Liz Smith, is now involved in connecting with State Representatives to further the conversations.

2024 Provider Fair - The first provider subcommittee will meet on January 17<sup>th</sup> @ 1 pm. James encouraged members to join in preparation for an even more successful Provider Fair in 2024. The event will be in-person where individuals and families learn about services and talk to providers. The subcommittee is discussing all the logistics including the season to attract more people.

Data Collection - James shared that the most recent meeting with Harmony was to ask providers/agencies of services for quarterly data. They are only required to provide data annually on specific data on service gaps, and waitlists.

Margo Polikoff with Tompkins County Children Special Care Needs will share a document approved by the Deputy Public Health Director that includes data for early intervention services, the number of service providers that were lost, and how many kids are eligible for services and are not getting them. James suggested adding it to an agenda to discuss.

Wala spoke about a conversation with a delivery person who dropped off equipment at her house. They informed her that two community residences closed due to staffing issues. Wala’s one-on-one aid is paid \$16/hour, but she supplements her as she realizes the low pay, no consideration for the wear and tear on the caregiver’s body and mental health, continuous training, and the dedication and commitment they have to help people in light of the limited work hours. She understands that not everyone can supplement their caregivers and is concerned that these valuable jobs may be phased out because of all the various factors.

James agreed and shared experiences he had. He strongly believes collecting data from providers/agencies will support many of the concerns.

Cassidy spoke on the information on transition services for students with disabilities shared with the subcommittee via email. It is a virtual 3-day informational conference on transition services for youth. This conference will provide valuable information to be effective advocates.

James shared that he and David Barr (TST BOCES) attended the CSE Chair Meeting this past November. The meeting discussed what are the available services, when should conversations happen to ensure that students and parents are having them well before their senior year (sophomore and junior years), referral services, and all things Front Door.

Margo also attended and believes that learning more from the chairpersons about the process and responsibilities and what they are doing to facilitate the transition would be useful. Sheila feels having data on the anticipated number of transitioning students a year from now would be beneficial in understanding the challenges and options of available services and asked if there was any interest from the chairs for one-on-one conversations. James doesn’t believe the chairs asked for one-on-one conversations vs. a bigger meeting but were available to converse after the meeting. He will get David’s input on the data she is interested in.

Nicole suggested disseminating information at the two general meetings, (the TACA meeting and the Regional Social Workers meeting), for counselors and social workers who are often working on the ground with the families doing transition planning and enrolling for the front door would be helpful.

James and Jeff had productive conversations with OPWDD transition staff, BOCES, and other providers about creating a clear roadmap to support students. Provider Fairs, parent-teacher evenings, TACA meetings, Regional Social Workers meetings, spaghetti dinners, and the CSE Chair meetings are great opportunities for providers to supply parents with information directly. They will schedule a meeting with Jennifer Goodman of BOCES to discuss more events.

#### Provider Updates

OPWDD – Jamie asked the subcommittee to review the 2023 annual report that was sent to subcommittee members recently. It has some valuable information, and she will be able to answer questions at next month’s meeting.

Margo added that Parent to Parent provides a multitude of free trainings including transition training, graduation trainings, and alternatives to guardianship trainings - [Home - Support for Parents of Children with Disabilities \(p2pusa.org\)](http://p2pusa.org). Wala is interested in financial literacy and planning for parents of children with special needs and for transitioning students for an agenda topic.

In closing, James encouraged members to join the 2024 Provider Fair subcommittee. Jeff will cover next month’s meeting as he will be attending the Legislative Days in Albany.

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



**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is  
Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.**