

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)

Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting

Final, approved 2.27.2025

Date: Thursday, November 14th 2024

Time: 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Location: Via Zoom

Interpreters: Ben Sparks and Meghann Cassidy

Minutes: Gina Petersen

CART: N/A

Members Present: Cody McEvoy, Briana Stradinger,

NCDHH Staff Present: Kim Davis, Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell

Technical Advisors Present: Diane Meyer, Ronda Rankin, Erika Ziemann, Sara Peterson

Members Absent: Scott Loder, Erik Decker

Technical Advisors Absent:

I. Meeting call to order:

Chairperson Briana Stradinger called the meeting to order at 2:22 PM.

Chairperson Stradinger announced the notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and all board members received notice simultaneously by email. Publication of official notice of the meeting appeared in a legal documents, local documents and general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act.

II. Approval of the Agenda:

Not enough members were present to meet quorum; approval of the agenda was tabled.

III. Approval of prior meeting minutes for [INSERT LAST MEETING DATE]

Not enough members were present to meet quorum; approvals of the meeting minutes from February 15th, 2024, May 15th, 2024, and August 15, 2024 were tabled until the next meeting.

IV. Discussions

- **Cody McEvoy**

- Mr. Cody McEvoy announced that Boystown signed with the Nebraska Regional Program and is starting a pilot program for counseling that reaches out to 9 places outside of the metro area, such as Scottsbluff and other rural areas.
- Typically there are 4 all staff meetings per year at Boystown to give updates. The most recent meeting shared that there are about 20 Deaf/Hard of Hearing children who are now attending preschool at Boystown. Mr. McEvoy shared that there are also a lot of new staff members on board in the research department.

- **Diane Meyer**

- Ms. Diane Meyer shared with the group that she is a speech language pathologist, and the American Speech language Association (ASHA) had their quarterly newsletter published and had in it a story about speech pathologists, audiologists and deaf educators in Massachusetts who developed a camp for middle school students to come in for leadership training and invited elementary kids later for those skills to be practiced. Ms. Meyer stated that she wanted to send that article to the Nebraska State Board of Education to show that Nebraska was a leader in that activity, as they have done camps for 27 years.
- Ms. Meyer announced that Ms. Sara Peterson, technical advisor, had a family emergency otherwise she would have been present today.
- Ms. Meyer described the family fall fun day in October at Bellevue Berry Patch. 90 people out of 107 registered attended.
- On December 14th Signing Santa will be at ESU 3 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Mike Brummer will be Santa. To help with waiting in line, there will be a Cookie decorating station, ornament making, and a “snowball sundae” station
- A team of kids made the second level of academic bowl, while the battle of the books team didn’t have enough points. Both teams were brand new, so there is hope for a better result next year.
- On December 22nd to 23rd there is a dance coming up called Pajama Jam at Norfolk middle school. Susan Elliott will be coming in to talk about transition with the kids.
- Ms. Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell asked Ms. Meyer for more details about Pajama Jam, to which Ms. Meyer responded that the kids will arrive at Norfolk Middle school on Friday the 22nd, change into pajamas, have a

dance and dinner then spend the night on the gym floor. Saturday morning there will be speakers with rotations, lunch, then depart about 1:00 PM.

- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell suggested that she and NCDHH Youth and Family Specialist Ashley Altman stop by the middle school, as they are both in Norfolk that weekend. Ms. Meyer responded with an affirmative, stating that they would need to text her to be let in, as the doors will be locked.
- Mr. Cody McEvoy asked who the fourth presenter would be for that activity. Ms. Meyer responded that she would check her drive for that information, suggesting that Ms. Ronda Rankin give her update in the meantime.

- **Ronda Rankin**

- Ms. Ronda Rankin shared that Kearney opened their behavioral health urgent care in the beginning of October to serve rural communities. There will be critical needs there, but children will not be able to stay and will have to be referred out.
- The behavioral health center that will be opening in January of 2026 is still on track. It is a 103,000 Ft. facility, of which there are less than a dozen of nationwide. There will be 40 single patient occupancy beds and is slated to open early 2026.
- Ms. Rankin stated that she will switch hats for a moment and no longer represent Children's, but instead Deaf Centric Hospital. Meetings will soon be started to get it going again. Ms. Rankin explained for those who are not familiar that Deaf Centric Hospital is a role reversal activity at UNMC in which medical students take on the role of patient, and the Deaf community become the providers. There is usually a mental health component involved too.

Ms. Sara Peterson, Technical Advisor, arrived at 2:42 PM

- **Briana Stradinger**

- Chairperson Briana Stradinger shared that she has been working on a project together with NCDHH Youth and Family Advocacy Specialist Ashley Altman (née Wulf) going to schools and doing presentations, workshops, and trainings with kids. Now the team has expanded to 5 people: Briana Stradinger, Ashley Altman, Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell, Lindsay Darnall Jr. and Candice Arteaga. Sakura will be handling the mental health field, while Lindsay Jr. will provide Deaf culture and history knowledge. Candice will be talking about Sorenson and how to utilize videophone services. Mental

health needs and independent living skills are areas that need to be worked on. Chairperson Stradinger expressed her excitement about the project continuing and expanding through the coming year.

- Mr. Cody McEvoy asked Chairperson Stradinger about the age group of the kids they are working with and how often they visit, to which Chairperson Stradinger replied that they are working with Bellevue, Ralston, and Iowa School for the Deaf high schools, but she wants to touch base with her director to get in touch with middle schools. Chairperson Stradinger shared that they typically visit schools twice a month.

V. NCDHH Agency Updates

- **Management Team Reports**

- **Kim Davis**

1. Ms. Meyer asked if there were any updates on the executive director search. Ms. Davis responded that the commission has partnered with Innivee Strategies and developed a search committee that is exterior to the commission with a lot of community members involved. They are going to be interviewing applicants soon
2. Ms. Meyer asked if there is an anticipated start date for the new hire, to which Ms. Davis replied that the hope is for early 2025.
3. Ms. Sara Peterson asked Ms. Davis if there is any update on the ScottsBluff position. Ms. Davis responded that there were some applications received, but they do not meet the qualifications for employment, though there is one possibility, and if anyone knows someone who wants to apply, please encourage them to do so.
4. Ms. Davis announced that the Educational Advocate duties have been transferred over to Youth and Family Advocacy Specialist Ashley Altman, who has been working hard and is heavily involved in schools and developing relationship connections statewide.
5. Ms. Davis announced that Ms. Altman will be out on maternity leave around the same time as Chairperson Stradinger. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell will take over some of her upcoming activities.

Ms. Erika Ziemann, technical advisor representing DHHS, arrived at 2:54 PM.

6. Chairperson Stradinger suggested each member introduce themselves for the benefit of Ms. Ziemann.
7. Ms. Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell introduced herself as the behavioral health coordinator at the commission, sharing that she has an extensive history of advocacy and done a lot around trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, child abuse, mental health recovery, addiction and more.
8. Chairperson Stradinger introduced herself as the chairperson for this committee and a vocational rehab counselor for the deaf and hard of hearing, working with both adults and students.
9. Ms. Kim Davis introduced herself as the lead advocacy specialist for the commission.
10. Ms. Diane Meyer introduced herself as the coordinator for the Metro Regional Program, which is part of the Nebraska Regional Program for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, who covers 8 counties and 29 school districts supporting children socially and emotionally, providing professional development to teachers, parents, and interpreters.
11. Mr. McEvoy introduced himself as a Boystown Counselor for the deaf and hard of hearing K-12. They are in contract with Ms. Meyer at the Metro Regional Program, meaning that all the schools under the Metro Regional Programs are students that they provide counseling to. There are 9 new students that they are focusing on using virtual counseling with for the rest of the state.
12. Ms. Rankin introduced herself as the interpreting services coordinator for Children's Nebraska.
13. Ms. Peterson introduced herself as the state coordinator for programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. She works closely with Ms. Meyer and other regional coordinators in trying to collaborate with other agencies like VR, Children's hospital, Boystown and more. Ms. Peterson apologized to the group, announcing that she has to leave the meeting early.
14. Ms. Ziemann introduced herself, sharing that she is stepping in for the role of former member Linda Witmuss. Ms. Ziemann described her role as a network administrator who oversees the 6 behavioral health regions in Nebraska, supporting them with mental health and substance use services and getting consumers access. Ms. Ziemann shared a personal note that she has a deaf aunt, and so is

honored to be part of this, stating that she is also working towards becoming a licensed clinician through Doane university.

15.

Ms. Peterson left the meeting at 3:00 PM

- **Behavioral Health Coordinator Reports**

- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell shared that last month was the mental health workshop, held using the money from the Enrichment Grant from the Omaha Community Foundation. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell stated that 5 people attended, which she considered awesome as it was short notice and in the middle of a weekday. Rachel Pointer put together a presentation around mental health and advocacy, from which a lot of good information was learned. Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell shared that she is waiting to see the commission gets accepted for another grant to use next year and wants to use that to focus on collaborating with the criminal justice system, interpreters, and the deaf community.
- Mr. McEvoy suggested focusing also on what happens after arrest, as there are gaps in that too, like finding out a court date, when to show up, knowing what numbers you need to call after arrest, things that can cause worse trouble for a person due to a miscommunication or lack thereof.
- Ms. Meyer suggested getting in contact with an officer at the Omaha Police Department who is fluent in sign language who might be a good individual to contact for a presentation, as he can speak from the professional side of things and explain the system, while having some awareness of Deaf culture and perspective.

Discussion

- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell shared the email she received from Scott Loder, who informed her that he is recovering from a fall and apologized for not being present. No word was received from Erik.
- Chairperson Stradinger stated that the meeting then cannot be continued, as quorum has still not been met for voting on the past meeting minutes.
- Ms. Davis suggested looking into the possibility of holding a meeting in December, or holding off on the next quarterly meeting date if there will be no quorum.

- Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell restated the need for a counselor to fill the vacant position, asking the group to encourage anyone they know who might be a good fit to apply. Ms. Davis asked Mr. McEvoy if there is anyone on his radar at Boystown, to which Mr. McEvoy responded that his department is only himself and one other person who is part time, but he can still suggest the idea to them.
- Chairperson Stradinger mentioned touching base with some contacts at DHHS, and suggested that perhaps NCDHH make a flyer, to which Ms. Davis responded that she could loop in Kelsey Cruz, NCDHH Public Information Officer.

VI. Committee Member updates

- Erica Ziemann, new member
 - See introductions from committee members under NCDHH agency updates

VII. Next Meeting Date

- TBA after December Full Board meeting

VIII. Meeting adjourn

- Chairperson Briana Stradinger adjourned the meeting at 3:30 PM