Nebraska1 Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)

**Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting**

DRAFT Version current as of 3.1.2022

**Date:** Thursday February 17th, 2022

**Time:** 2:00 – 4:00 PM

**Location:** 4600 Valley Rd, Room 4A, Lincoln NE / Zoom link also provided

**Interpreters:** Sharon Sinkler and Roxanne Petersen

**Minutes:**  Jamie Petersen

**CART:** None

**Members Present:**, Ms. Kathleen Valle, Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell, Joan Daughton, Rhonda Rankin

**NCDHH Staff Present:** Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Ms. Abby Giambattista, Advocacy Specialist; Ms. Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist; Ms. Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist

**Technical Advisors Present:** Ms. Diane Meyer, Ms. Sue Czaplewski

**Members Absent:** Vickie Frizzell Pratt, Ms. Linda Wittmuss, Ms. Tracey Minto

**Technical Advisors Absent:**

1. **Meeting call to order:**

Ms. Vicki Steinhauer-Campbell called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m.

Ms. Steinhauer 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 newspaper of general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act.

1. **Approval of the Agenda:**

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell made the motion to accept the agenda. With no further discussion, the motion carried with all voting aye.

1. **Approval of prior meeting minutes for November 19th, 2021:**

Ms. Ashley Wulf inquired whether all members present had received the correct version of prior meeting minutes, as she had originally sent out the wrong document via email attachment. A few minutes were allocated to ensure all members received and had time to review the correct document for the most prior meeting on November 19th, 2021.

Ms. Kathleen Valle made the motion to accept the minutes as written. Mr. John Wyvill seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with all voting aye.

1. **Discussion:**
   * Member Committee Updates:
     + Ms. Wulf updated the group that previous Behavioral Health Coordinator, Cody McEvoy, is no longer with NCDHH and that Ms. Wulf is taking over the position temporarily until a new Behavioral Health Coordinator is hired.

Ms. Wulf updated the group on new team members Rhonda Rankin, the interpreting service coordinator at Children’s Hospital and ASL interpreter of 16 years and Joan Daughton, child psychologist at Children’s Hospital.

*Ms. Diane Meyer joined the meeting.*

Ms. Wulf asked all present committee members to introduce themselves, including Ms. Rankin and Dr. Daughton. She shared that the position of Chairperson is still open.

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell commented with a brief explanation that the position’s responsibilities including running, controlling, and providing guidance on meeting procedures or questions. It is a one-year term. If anyone has questions or is interested in volunteering for Chairperson, let Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell know.

Project Harmony:

Mr. Wyvill updated the group and provided some background on Project Harmony. Mr. Wyvill summarized that the situation involved an educational interpreter providing service for the child when communicating with law enforcement, when the interpreter was involved in the initial abuse allegation. The two main areas of concern were: the ethics of an educational interpreter communicating with investigative parties when they were the one involved in the initial allegation report and secondly, the issue related to an educational interpreter providing service in place of a licensed community interpreter.

The educational interpreter claims that the police and Project Harmony were aware that they were not a licensed interpreter. However, Project Harmony and the head of the child abuse investigation unit remain steadfast that they were not informed of that fact. In response to the situation, Mr. McEvoy traveled to Project Harmony to provide training which was well-received.

A cease-and-desist letter has been delivered to the interpreter in question, and the matter is considered closed at this time. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell opened the discussion for comments or questions. No questions or comments were presented.

Mr. Wyvill followed-up his explanation by commenting that multiple reports have been received, throughout the state, of educational interpreters, that are not licensed, interpreting in a law-enforcement setting. He explained that this situation was the first documented occurrence that was brought forward which prompted our board to act. Mr. Wyvill expressed that this occurrence was a tragic situation that should not have happened, but it is being used as a teachable moment moving forward.   
  
With no further questions, the discussion moved forward.

Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD):

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell, the VP of the Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD), provided an update. She shared that Mr. McEvoy was working with two organizations, Hands & Voices and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention action center (EHDI). A HRSA grant is being used to develop a Deaf Mentoring Program, which NE does not have. Some organizations have expressed interest in hosting this program.

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell provided a brief explanation of what the Deaf Mentoring Program will be. When a child from birth to 9-months of age is newly identified as Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing and the families are unsure of what to do moving forward, Deaf mentors will be able to provide resources for parents and families who are seeking support.

NeAD will be awarded this program. She continued to provide an explanation on how this program will work. Within NeAD’s bylaws, there is a role for “Executive Director” which is an ongoing position that does not change as opposed to a board member that has a term limit. The Executive Director will be a permanent position. The idea behind using this position, is that the Executive Director will be trained and hire a “coordinator” using the HRSA grant money to develop a curriculum and start the Deaf Mentoring Program. The hired coordinator would then be the individual running the day-to-day operations, and the Executive direction would continuously monitor the program along with the executive board assisting. This is a very exciting opportunity. NeAD is meeting with Hands & Voices and EHDI in the following week to begin the planning phase, which is step-1 in getting this program implemented in Nebraska. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell opened the topic up for discussion or questions.   
  
Ms. Kathleen Valle made a comment that she assumed, based on the description, that the program coordinator would likely be working closely with hospitals like Children’s or CHI to identify the children who have not passed their hearing testing to provide information to and connect with families about the Deaf Mentoring Program.

*Discussion on the roles of Executive Direction and coordinator for this mentorship program.*

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell explained the focus right now is on appointing an Executive Director and hiring a program coordinator to begin development of the program itself. Working from there the next step is to ensure that families have information available to them about the program.

Dr. Daughton expressed her excitement about the plans for the program and added that it would be worth considering translating any materials they have for information info various languages.

*Discussion on whether there are already materials in various languages from EHDI.*

Dr. Daughton also suggested finding a way to connect with refugees coming into the Nebraska area in the future. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell expressed interest in the suggestion and made a note of it to reference in the future.

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell opened the topic for more questions or comments. With no further discussion, the meeting moved on.

* + Group Discussion

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell introduced the topic for the discussion as: areas to focus on in 2022 for improvement in the behavioral health field.

Mr. Wyvill updated the group from the standpoint of that he and Ms. Sharon Sinkler have been working on a potential training workshop for sign language interpreters to work with Deaf interpreters. This workshop will be working alongside the MHAC.

Ms. Rankin requested a general update on what has been going on already in the field of behavioral health. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell expressed that Mr. McEvoy had been working on updating a lot of demographic information for counselors and hospitals throughout the state of Nebraska. He also had been providing some training workshops for Hospitals.

Mr. Wyvill shared that the United States Department of Justice has entered a settlement agreement for communication access in the healthcare setting, which we have chaired with the Nebraska Hospital Association and Nebraska Medicine. This specifically outlines the standard of care and communication access expectations.

*Discussion on events transpiring between Nebraska Medicine and CHI.*

In response to Nebraska Medicine encountering Deaf patients and having issues providing appropriate access to communication, a landmark document has been created for the state to reference that provides guidance on the standard of care for providing communication access.

Dr. Daughton inquired whether there was usefulness in providing more training or information to Deaf/HoH families and individuals on when to access behavioral services and what those services look like.

*Discussion on this.*

Potentially NCDHH could partner with NeAD in providing a workshop this year, involving the new behavioral health coordinator after they are hired and the MHAC.

Ms. Wulf agreed with that idea and brought up an idea for providing training for interpreters on how to address patients and how to approach the counselor in order to interact more deeply with a Deaf patient. It can be extremely emotionally taxing on interpreters working in mental health related topics. To the best of her knowledge there is not a training out there that covers these types of topics in relation to this. Ms. Rankin made a point that there is specific training that has been brought up in previous meetings about the Alabama Interpreter Training Program that she highly recommends reaching out or for NCDHH to get involved with this program. They offer training for Deaf interpreters as well.

*Discussion on mental-well-being of interpreters.*

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell suggested that, due to its importance and popularity, this topic be revisited and brainstormed at another meeting.

Ms. Meyer brought up an ongoing issue within the school system. There are many educators retiring out/leaving the field which creates a large gap between educators who are highly-knowledgeable in the area of Deaf and HoH and newer professionals entering the workforce who may not have that expertise yet. Ms. Meyer wondered if there were any resources out there to help bridge that gap and give newer educators some introductory information on working with Deaf and HoH individuals.

*Discussion on a potential workshop sponsored through NCDHH on this topic.*

Dr. Daughton inquired whether there was usefulness in surveying mental health needs/difficulties since the pandemic and then seeing how those reported needs could be met.

*Discussion on whether there are any surveys already in place that address this.*

Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell suggested that a survey of this nature could be something the new Behavioral Health Coordinator develops. Mr. Wyvill mentioned that there may be usefulness in working with Mr. Steve Hamerdinger in Alabama.

Ms. Valle spoke up on the issue of ASL interpreter shortage. She wondered if there was a way to partner with the Deaf/HoH community to encourage Deaf/HoH patients arrive to their appointments. There have been situations in which an interpreter is confirmed and the patient does not arrive. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell mentioned that there is not much ability to control those types of situations from the MHAC standpoint. Typically, providers send out reminders to patients.

Ms. Kimberly Davis commented that a lot of the time it is the responsibility of the provider to send out reminders in a way that is accessible like via text, email, etc.

Ms. Wulf mentioned that it may be worth it to encourage providers to confirm the scheduled ASL interpreter with the Deaf/HoH patient who might not know and not want to come in and struggle with accessibility.

*Discussion on this.*

Dr. Daughton inquired whether there was a way for the MHAC taskforce to increase the number of interpreters. Issues in this area include lack of programs in NE and general awareness of interpreting as a career path.

*Discussion on interpreter training programs.*

Suggestion on taking information in the form of presentations or classes of some kind to local high schools to spread awareness on interpreting. Ms. Meyer mentioned the challenges of getting dual-enrollment programs due to pushback from secondary levels.

*Discussion on this.*

1. **NCDHH Executive Director Report – Mr. Wyvill:**
   * Board news:

The governor reappointed Frances Beaurivage and Sandy Shaw to our board.

Jamie Petersen started working as Staff Assistant for NCDHH on February 14th.

Thanks to Ms. Wulf for her hard work in picking up Mr. McEvoy’s work and duties as Behavioral Health Coordinator as well as working as an Advocacy Specialist.

The behavioral health coordinator position has closed and interviews will be conducted in the coming week. There is a robust candidate pool, several of which happen to be D/deaf and have a background in mental health.

There are several events coming up: Lincoln Association for the Deaf (LAD) will be hosting the MAAD basketball tournament on March 18th and 19th. Ms. Davis and Ms. Abigail Giambatista are working on the Lincoln Zoo event on April 24th. The date for the Lincoln Saltdogs game will be July 20th and the Pioneers baseball game will be on June 17th.

* + Bills
    - LB 928 requires captioning of state races and political ads on TV/video. Mr. Wyvill commented that it looks promising that the bill will advance.
    - LB 1267 the Health Equity Liasion bill sponsored by Senator Tony Vargas, which is asking for American rescue funds to address the health disparity among people with disabilities and certain ethnic groups. Mr. Wyvill indicated that the board is strongly supportive of this bill and that Ms. Davis will be testifying on behalf of the commission.
    - LB 1161 addressing funding for educational interpreter training and equipment for Deaf/HoH students will be presented on March 1st. The commission will be testifying in favor of this bill.
    - LB 1162 addressing rural relief funding for interpreters also has an additional component called the Communication Access Program, which will provide funding throughout the state for any Deaf/HoH person needing an ASL interpreter when meeting with a lawyer outside of court.
  + Ms. Sharon Sinkler put out a program for the training of Deaf interpreters. We now have Ms. Davis, Ms. Wulf, and Mr. McEvoy have become licensed Deaf interpreters.

With no further questions or comments, Mr. Wyvill concluded his report.

1. **Agency Updates – All**
   * **Children’s Hospital report – Ms. Rhonda Rankin:** able to acquire a VP at Children’s Hospital so that the Deaf/HoH community can reach out directly for any interpreting needs or concerns instead of going through VRS.
   * **NE Regional Program report – Ms. Diane Meyer:** There is an Arts Festival coming up in the following week after being postponed from January due to COVID. This event features a Deaf artist that is coming to teach clay and pottery skills to students.

*Discussion on the arts festival event and the Deaf artist.*

The MRP committee meeting is coming up next week on Tuesday.

Ms. Meyer has been going into OPS once a month to bring Regional Program activities to them on evenings and weekends. There has been a challenge in getting some parents to attend/bring their children to regional program activities. Ms. Meyer commented that things are growing with these activities and it is looking promising.

There will be a Dance competition and speech competition are being held on the same weekend of April 31st in Lincoln. COVID-precautions will be taken.

* + **CHI report – Ms. Kathleen Valle:** CHI health requires all employees to wear KN95 masks in the patient-care area. This has been a challenge in working with Deaf/HoH patients. Patients are not required to wear the KN95 masks, but providers and interpreters are. “Mask-fitters” are being implemented, which can be utilized by interpreters and providers using clear-view masks to adhere the mask against the face better for improved protection.
  + **NCDHH Advocacy Specialist report – Ms.** **Kim Davis:** NCDHH has reinacted the community roundtable, which Ms. Davis is the coordinator of. The roundtable looks at what issues and events are happening within the Deaf/HoH community in NE. There are 3 concerns identified by the roundtable.
    - Mental health and early intervention services
    - # of staff and interpretes in educational settings
    - Increasing awareness of the Voc Rehab services for children and adults

Potential for a member of the MHAC to be included at the community roundtable. If anyone is interested please contact Kim Davis by email ([kim.davis@nebraska.gov](mailto:kim.davis@nebraska.gov)) or VP (402-261-2657). The next meeting will be focusing on the 3 identified areas of concern.

* + **Ms. Ashley Wulf:** meeting with the Omaha Stormchasers to set-up a Deaf/HoH awareness day at their baseball game this summer. Will keep the committee updated.
  + **Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell (VR):** There is an opening for a VR counselor in Omaha that has closed. There are interviews being scheduled for that hopefully within the next few weeks. Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell will be involved in the interview process.

Opening up priority 1 for those who applied for 2 or more significant disabilities. Working on priority 2 for 1 significant disability which has no one on the waitlist. So hopefully priority 3 can be opened soon. There are a few more open counselor positions as well.

*Discussion on event hosted by Ms. Wulf and Mr. McEvoy and a presentation by Ms. Davis focusing on NCDHH services available for clients. Feedback was positive.*

1. **Next Meeting Dates / Meeting Time from 2p – 4p:**
   * Next meeting will be in Omaha. Tentative dates, waiting for confirmations from more people. Email will be sent out again for April 12th. Mr. Wyvill clarified that the next meeting will be held in April to align with the onboarding process of the new NCDHH behavioral health coordinator as suggested by Mr. McEvoy.
   * Dates for the August meeting will be discussed at the next meeting.
2. **Meeting Adjournment:**
   * Ms. Steinhauer-Campbell adjourned the meeting at 3:40pm.