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

**Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting**

**Date:** November 10, 2020  
**Time:** 2pm – 4pm  
**Location:** 4600 Valley Rd, Room 4A, Lincoln NE  
**Interpreters:** Ben Sparks

**Minutes:** Traci Johns  
**CART:** CART Services of ERI / Margaret “Mydge” Heaney

**Members Present:**

**NCDHH Staff Present:** Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Mr. Cody McEvoy, Behavioral Health Coordinator; Ms. Kim Davis, Lincoln Advocacy Specialist, Ms. Abby Giambattista, Lincoln Advocacy Specialist  
 **Technical Advisors Present:**

**Members Absent:** Ms. Tracey Minto, Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell, Ms. Kathleen Valle, Ms. Linda Wittmuss, Mr. Benjamin Clancy, Ms. Lisa Vogel

**Technical Advisors Absent:** Ms. Sue Czaplewski, Ms. Diane Meyer, Ms. Tina Work

**Meeting called to order:** by Mr. Cody McEvoy called the meeting to order at 2:10pm

Mr. Cody McEvoy 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 the November 3rd, 2020 edition of the Omaha World Herald, a legal newspaper of general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act.

**Approval of the August 6, 2019 meeting minutes** – This was tabled until the next committee meeting due to not having a quorum.

**Approval of the November 5, 2019 meeting minutes** – This was tabled until the next committee meeting due to not having a quorum.

**Approval of the February 5, 2020 meeting minutes** – This was tabled until the next committee meeting due to not having a quorum.

**Approval of the May 12, 2020 meeting minutes** – This was tabled until the next committee meeting due to not having a quorum.

Introductions made with all in attendance.

**New Business**

* Mr. McEvoy reported that he will be taking over the position of Behavioral Health Coordinator with the departure of Carly Weyers.
* Mr. McEvoy shared that he has been working with CHI to provide advocacy work in the facilities and he has also been meeting with doctors to share about the services available for their deaf and hard of hearing patients.
* Mr. McEvoy reported that he learned that the Omaha Police Department is utilizing on-site counselors to help deescalate conflicts between officers and citizens. He reached out to law enforcement and provided his cell number as he would be willing to also assist if his services were needed in these situations.
* Enrichment Grant Update

Mr. McEvoy reported that he has two proposals submitted at this time. The first is for a mental, physical, nutrition and positive reinforcement program. The second is for a CDI (Certified Deaf Interpreter) that was supposed to happen in 2020 but due to Covid-19 this will be in 2021 instead.

* Updating Behavioral Health Website

Mr. McEvoy shared that he has some ideas on how to improve the website and has submitted a list of ideas to Kelsey Cruz, PIO at the Commission.

* Discussion on Group Home Project

Mr. McEvoy shared that he would like to get clarification on the authority of the group to make proposals to the state and to create a team to define what a group home would look like. Discussion on this postponed until next meeting.

* **NCDHH Executive Director Report** – Mr. Wyvill
  + Director Wyvill commented that the advisory committee is advisory in nature and can provide advisory opinions to chairs of organizations such as the Commission itself or the board. If it is the collective will of the advisory committee that they want to submit a report on a specific issue, they're within their charter as an advisory committee to provide input to the staff and also to the agency.
  + Director Wyvill reported that due to the meeting being governed by Open Meetings Laws, it is unfortunately logistically difficult to meet virtually with Zoom. This is because every meeting location must be announced in your release and also there must be people at those locations available to open the meeting up. This would also mean that the public could attend in any of those locations.
  + Director Wyvill shared that there are several new team members. Traci Johns, a new staff assistant, will be working with the Mental Health Advisory Committee. Ashley Wulf has taken the place of Mr. McEvoy as an advocacy specialist in Omaha. Mr. McEvoy has taken a promotion and is now the behavioral health coordinator for our agency. Abby Giambattista started this week and is the newest advocacy specialist in Lincoln. Also recently added is an advocacy specialist in Scottsbluff, Susan Whitaker, who may be known in the community as a sign language instructor in the Scottsbluff area.
  + Director Wyvill reported that the agency is embarking on a strategic planning process to review and possibly revise the mission, goals and objectives of the agency. A town hall meeting was held last week that announced the beginning of the strategic planning process. There will be several stages including a survey that will be going out in January and February where stakeholders will be able to submit comments about the strategic plan in either ASL or English. The full board will review a survey document at its March meeting. After that the will be a series of open forums throughout the state where people can come in person and give feedback on what the agency should be focusing on. This feedback will be presented to the board in June. At that point it will be decided by staff and the board if any changes should be made to the agency’s vision, mission, or goals.
  + Director Wyvill shared that the agency is also focusing on a future apprenticeship license so that graduates from a program at an interpreter school or college will have a chance to have a provisional license for three years to bridge the gap between graduation and getting a national certification. The task force assembled for this project is going to meet one more time to review it, and then submit the proposed professional license for debate and deliberations to the IRB in December. The proposal will then be reviewed by the full board at the December meeting. If it is adopted, then the agency will proceed with a formal rule making process.
  + Director Wyvill shared that the agency is also looking at a number of focus areas related to COVID. The check in and stay connected campaign is continuing with team members making a point to check in with everyone while they're in isolation. The agency will be closely observing the impact of the vaccine and the agency will mostly be working remotely for the next few months.
  + Director Wyvill reported that the agency is focusing on healthcare access in Nebraska, and specifically a concern for the deaf and hard of hearing community, especially in the currently masked environment. The agency is working collaboratively with a number of different organizations and people to address deficiencies seen and observed in the Nebraska healthcare system.
  + Director Wyvill reported that Jessica Larrison is working with Director Wyvill, Jonathan Scherling and the Department of Education to see how to get information to school districts so students can appropriately consider Iowa School for the Deaf as an option as it appears to be a number of students are being blocked from going to ISD. While ISD may not be an appropriate school for everyone, it might be good for some given the combination of curriculum and social/emotional needs of a student being immersed with the ASL language. Jessica and Jonathan will be working on probably having a Zoom meeting for interested parents to attend.

**Agency Updates**

* + - Mr. McEvoy shared with the group that he had an update from Nebraska VR. They are focusing on priority group 1 which means individuals who have significant and serious disabilities. They are focusing on getting 1 to 300 people off their waiting list monthly. The goal right now is to have priority group 1 depleted by the end of the year. Currently, all VR offices are closed and have been since March. Counselors and placement staff are working remotely via Zoom, telephonically, and email.
    - Mr. McEvoy also shared that Sue Czaplewski with NDE reported that Nebraska Regional Program is hosting several events to address students' mental health. There is a teen night on the second Monday of the month via Zoom. They also have a statewide preteen Zoom meeting via ASL that is occurring in spring and summer and it is being discussed about whether to continue it into fall. There have also been meetings with deaf individuals as well as teachers of the deaf and their students. They have had deaf and hard of hearing presenters at events. Recent presenters are Mr. McEvoy, Vicki Garcia, a NASA engineer, and CJ Jones, a deaf comedian.
    - Central West Nebraska Regional Program had a group led by deaf and hard of hearing adults with deaf and hard of hearing speakers who were in NRP programs and they talked about their experiences beyond high school.
    - Central West Nebraska Regional Program also just had a transition summit for deaf and hard of hearing students virtually with several days of activities covering topics like life qualities, mental health, and setting high expectations. Mike Brummer has a monthly SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) for October, November, and December where students submit five short videos relating to integrity, resilience, gratitude, and celebration. They had another speaker come in regarding personal hygiene and mental health.
    - If you've got ideas for future events for regional programs, be sure to share those with Sue Czaplewski.
    - **Ms. Kim Davis** – Ms. Davis shared that the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles now has an ASL version of the driver's test. They had an EIPA and former state evaluator come in and review the stimulus or the questions in ASL to see if they were appropriate or linguistically neutral and they were very impressed. It’s in pilot now in six locations and will go statewide December 9th. They reviewed four hours of test questions and although not all of the 200 questions were reviewed, the DMV is encouraging feedback from the test takers if there were any questions that were not clear or inappropriate. Ms. Davis also shared with the group that a Commercial Driver License (CDL) is a federally regulated license through the Department of Transportation and they do not allow sign language interpreters for the test. Also, while there is a waiver for deaf drivers, they still have to be able to read and write English.
    - Director John Wyvill also updated the group that the NCDHH offices are closed to the public and that while there may be some people present at the office it is strongly encouraged that most meetings are done by Zoom or other means. He also shared that Sue from the ESU was very complimentary of Mr. McEvoy and his presentation to the various educational programs.

**Next Meeting Dates / Meeting Time from 2p – 4p**

* Next meeting date to be determined by email.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm.