

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

Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting

Approved by Committee January 14, 2021

Date: May 12, 2020

Time: 2pm – 4pm

Location: Zoom

Interpreters: Ben Sparks, Kelly Brakenhoff

Minutes: Cindy Woldt

CART: CART Services of ERI / Margaret “Mydge” Heaney

Members Present: Ms. Tracey Minto, Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell, Ms. Kathleen Valle, Ms. Linda Wittmuss

NCDHH Staff Present: Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Mr. Cody McEvoy, Omaha Advocacy Specialist; Ms. Carly Weyers, Behavioral Health Coordinator; Ms. Kim Davis, Lincoln Advocacy Specialist

Technical Advisors Present:

Members Absent: Mr. Benjamin Clancy, Ms. Lisa Vogel,

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

Meeting called to order: by Ms. Carly Weyers called the meeting to order at 2:10pm

Ms. Carly Weyers 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 May 5, 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.

Introductions made with all in attendance.

New Business

- **Coronavirus updates – resources**

Ms. Weyers reported that NCDHH is contacting clients through phone, email and video to assure that their needs are being met. The offices across the state are currently not open to the public. Ms. Weyers shared that the agency is completing a number of vlogs relating to COVID-19 to relay information about mental health and self-care. The vlogs are posted on Facebook giving NCDHH the opportunity to stay in touch with their clients. Ms. Weyers asked if anyone has information that they would like to share with our community to please let her know. Ms. Weyers offered if the group has information to translate into a vlog or with captions, NCDHH can assist with doing that. COVID-19 has a large impact on the deaf community, it is encouraging that people are coming together to sharing a list of resources to the community.

Ms. Witmuss shared with the group that they have weekly Monday meetings regarding COVID-19, topics include changes to billing practices, access, implementing technology. The group has responded with a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents. Also adding that if you want participate in one of these meetings that you need to submit an email ahead of time.

- **Coffee with Cody and Carly**

Ms. Weyers shared that she and Mr. McEvoy have started a new pod cast series called “Coffee with Cody and Carly”. This is a deaf version of a pod cast series where the two of them sit down and have a chat. The desire is to do these on a monthly basis, posting on Facebook. Ms Weyers asked if anyone has any topics that they would like them to discuss on the next pod cast to please let her know.

- **NCDHH Executive Director Report – Mr. Wyvill**

- Director Wyvill shared with the group that NCDHH sent out communication earlier today on our “Check - In, Stay Connected” program. NCDHH has been reaching out to individuals and organizations for the past month. The Agencies intent is provide resources and support for those that need our assistance. Director Wyvill encouraged those participating in this meeting to please reach out and let NCDHH know how we can assist. We are particularly looking at the interest of senior adults who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing. Director Wyvill shared that NCDHH is an information and referral agency, we can’t provide services but we can connect individuals in need to the services that they need.
- The biggest challenge that we are dealing with in the COVID environment is the face masks. For those that rely on communication in facial expressions and lip

reading, the masks are creating communication challenges. NCDHH is working with ways to help address and overcome those barriers. This would include the clear plastic masks, others are different communication strategies. Director Wyvill added that this is number one for NCDHH besides the check in and stay connected plan.

- Director Wyvill also shared with the group that NCDHH is working on communication access in the healthcare settings. In this environment it might be difficult to secure a live interpreter for a number of different reasons, could be that the interpreter is not available or the interpreter might not be willing to put themselves at risk due to COVID-19. This may result in the reliance on Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). NCDHH wants to make sure that we have effective communication.
- NCDHH is also seeing that on the local and state level where we are having tow Mayors and the Governor that are having sign language interpreters present for their press conferences relating to COVID-19.
- We are looking at a 15% unemployment rate, we haven't seen these numbers since the Great Depression. We go from a 2 – 3% up to 15% unemployment, individuals with disabilities suffer the most. Director Wyvill shared that NCDHH is working with the Department of Labor and others to make sure that the processing for unemployment checks and working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to help assist individuals who have recently lost their jobs.
- Director Wyvill shared that NCDHH will be having additional vlogs coming out regarding the stay connected program in addition to more behavioral health related information. Sorenson Communications just released a line in which someone can call in for a suicide prevention line. NCDHH will be sharing additional information about this in the future.
- Director Wyvill discussed about how the educational settings have changed, basically overnight due to COVID-19. We will see students grades suffer and communication access so that's been some of our priorities in making sure we reach out to serve those in need.
- Director Wyvill wrapped up that over-all in a nutshell our program has been healthy and safety first and then drill down for the other issues at hand. Encouraged the group to stay in touch with us by social media because we will have a lot of outreach activities.

Old Business

- **Coffee with Cops event**
Ms. Weyers added that this event was held back in February, 2020 with a great turnout. Ms. Weyers added that we got to see a lot of new faces at the event.
- **Hospital complaints and emergency preparedness**
Ms. Weyers and Mr. McEvoy are working on updating the hospital complaints, and getting these stored in one location on an excel document.
- **Enrichment Foundation Grant – Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) Workshop**
Ms. Weyers shared that this grant was approved, with a workshop currently scheduled for October, 2020. Ms. Weyers has a presenter from Washington D.C. lined up for a presentation regarding CDI.
- **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)**
Ms. Weyers shared that the NAD Conference that was going to be held in July, 2020 is now cancelled due to COVID-19.

Agency Updates

- **Ms. Kathleen Valle** – nothing to report
- **Ms. Tracey Minto** – Ms. Minto touched base on the use of masks and trying to do therapy. Adding that she relies on lip-reading when she is in a therapy session with her clients. Also adding that she is having some struggles with insurance companies regarding coverage for telehealth. Discussion on the policies and procedures that are involved with informing her clients on the need to wear masks during their session, and that they need to take their temperature before they come in. Ms. Minto wants to assure that her insurance liability company will cover her if something were to happen regarding COVID-19.

Discussion between the members on the payment for telehealth.

Ms. Davis shared with the group about a couple of different resources / applications that might be of assistance to Ms. Minto. Ms. Davis agreed to email the information discussed to Ms. Weyers so that she can relay that to the committee members.

- **Mr. Cody McEvoy** – Mr. McEvoy shared with the group that he and Ms. Weyers recently did a social/emotional training to the Norfolk area by Zoom. This was for elementary through high school aged kids to help them handle the changes, confrontation and frustration in dealing with their social/emotional skills.

Mr. McEvoy added that he and Ms. Weyers also did a presentation called “Survival in Quarantine” that was to junior and seniors in high school.

Mr. McEvoy also mentioned that the Deaf Counseling Center has counseling services online, and sharing what all the Deaf Counseling Center has to offer.

Mr. McEvoy shared with the group that he will be graduating soon.

- **Ms. Linda Wittmuss** – Ms. Wittmuss shared that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) / Division of Behavioral Health submitted to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMSA) for emergency COVID-19 funding. DHHS was awarded a \$2 million grant that runs for about 16 months. The purpose is to expand capacity to treatment and support services to those who have serious mental illness or substance use disorders or both. The second part of this grant is to provide funds for individuals who may not have serious mental illness, but are having trauma related parenting issues and things like that. The third part of the grant is to provide funding for the healthcare workforce. Ms. Wittmuss shared that the grant was just awarded 2 weeks ago. DHHS will be using the infrastructure of the regional behavioral health partners. Ms. Wittmuss asked those in the meeting to do some outreach to those providers to see if they could access some of the grant funds.

Ms. Wittmuss also shared about the communication during this meeting on suicide prevention. She is encouraged that this communication is taking place. In the future DHHS will be focusing on how to do a little better outreach in this area. Noting that one thing that they are looking at is how much down the road will with whole COVID-19 change the picture of how behavioral health services are delivered in the future. Adding that there will be more and more services that will be offered virtually and in nontraditional places, hopefully this will increase access and reduce some of the stigma on getting assistance.

- **Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell** – Ms. Steinhauer – Campbell shared that the VR offices are also closed at this time, they are working with clients by zoom, telephone and online. Adding that those individuals who have been looking for work has temporarily been suspended due to COVID-19. Ms. Steinhauer – Campbell shared that a lot of people are isolated at this point, seeing an increase in calls with people just wanting to talk. Added that VR does not have a date on when they will be returning to the offices. Also noted that VR plans to be ordering some clear masks to assist with communication.

Ms Steinhauer – Campbell shared that she is a part of the Nebraska Summit, the three day event was to be held to the University Nebraska Lincoln (UNL). With COVID-19, it was decided to move this event to a Zoom environment. Ms. Steinhauer gave a recap of how the summit works.

- **Ms. Kim Davis** – Ms. Davis shared that she is doing outreach with clients who are deaf plus, wanting to make sure that this clientele understands what is going on in the world right now with COVID-19. Discussion on how the communication is going with this age group. Ms. Davis shared the importance of being able to have the sign language interpreters that are a part of the Governor and the Mayor’s Press Conference’s

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

- August 11, 2020 – Omaha
- November 10, 2020 - Lincoln

The meeting adjourned at 3:18pm.