

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

Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting

Approved by Committee April 29, 2021

Date: January 14, 2021

Time: 2pm – 4pm

Location: Online Zoom meeting

Interpreters: Sharon Sinkler and Amber Tucker

Minutes: Traci Johns

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

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

NCDHH Staff Present: Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Mr. Cody McEvoy, Behavioral Health Coordinator

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

Members Absent:

Technical Advisors Absent:

Meeting called to order: Mr. Cody McEvoy called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m.

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 January 7th, 2021, 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 meeting minutes for November 5, 2019, February 11, 2020, and May 12, 2020, and November 10th, 2020, meeting minutes:

Ms. Diane Meyer made the motion to accept all four meeting minutes as written. Ms. Sue Czaplewski seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Ms. Tracey Minto, Ms. Kathleen Valle, Ms. Linda Wittmuss, Mr. Benjamin Clancy, and Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell all voting aye.

New Business

- Mr. McEvoy shared that he has been doing a podcast “Coffee with Cody”. Recently guests included two Nebraskans that are attending two different colleges and they shared about their experiences attending college in a COVID environment. Mr. McEvoy also shared that the Facebook page has been doing well with many updates being posted.
- Mr. McEvoy shared that his work with CHI to provide advocacy work in the facilities has been going well. Ms. Kathleen Valle commented that this work has been super helpful to her and that she is receiving good feedback from patients and providers. It has been helpful for her to understand the different roles that an ASL interpreter, a Certified Deaf Interpreter and a deaf advocate have.
- 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) training that was supposed to happen in 2020 but due to Covid-19 this will be in 2021 instead. While the date of the CDI training is still dependent upon COVID, it is being planned for an all day Saturday and Sunday event with a proctored exam included to license the participants as Certified Deaf Interpreters. Nebraska has a great need as there are no Certified Deaf Interpreters at this time. Mr. McEvoy explained that CDIs are useful in various settings when a deaf person does not understand English language. Ms. Sharon Sinkler, NCDHH Interpreter Program Coordinator, explained that a Deaf Interpreter (DI) is a state certification and is 16 hours of training while the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) is a national certification and is a more stringent test through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID).

The second proposal is to focus on mental health, physical health and nutrition. This may be extra helpful this year with the COVID environment that has led to more isolation, Zoom fatigue, binge watching and closed gyms.

- Updating Behavioral Health Website

Mr. McEvoy shared that he will be looking to update and freshen up the website. He is hoping to make it easier to read and is thinking of adding mental health provider bios to make finding the appropriate provider easier. Any ideas for the website can be E-mailed to Mr. McEvoy. Ms. Linda Wittmuss commented that a link to the Division of Behavioral

Health website and resources on a variety of topics with FAQs, especially with an emphasis on opioid overdose abuse in Nebraska, would be beneficial. Mr. McEvoy also shared that he would like to add information about the national Deaf Therapy Center and The Deaf Counseling Center, who offer telehealth for counseling. This may help with the privacy stigma associated with hiring local interpreters to help with mental health services. Jessica Larrison will also be added to the website as an education advocate and to provide more educational resources.

- Discussion on Group Home Project

Mr. McEvoy discussed with the group that having a facility familiar with sign language would be very helpful. Even if the facility mainly focused on people that can hear, having sign language available as a tool of communication would have a huge impact on the mental health of a deaf person. Perhaps focusing on one facility and bringing deaf individuals together in that facility would be beneficial.

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

- Director Wyvill commented that the Commission has been involved with DHHS and is participating in the Nebraska vaccine task force in an advisory capacity to make sure information being communicated is accessible. As a result, Sharon Sinkler, NCDHH interpreter, was on a DHHS Facebook Live event recently. The Commission was also able to advocate for sign language interpreters that work in a medical or school setting to have access to the vaccine. The CDC and Health department agreed that they are priority individuals.
- Director Wyvill reported that the LEAD-K advisory committee was formed and that they are working closely with the Department of Education. There will be a series of meetings that are posted on our website. Cody McEvoy is also helping in that advisory committee and the group will provide recommendations by the end of the year.
- Director Wyvill shared that the agency is also making a revision to the Rules and Regulations related to interpreters. In addition to technical corrections, the Commission has also added the Apprentice License. This will allow a graduate from a program at an interpreter school or college to have a chance to have a provisional license for three years to bridge the gap between graduation and getting a national certification. This is set for public hearing on February 19th.

- Director Wyvill shared that there are several new team members. Ashley Wulf has taken the place of Mr. McEvoy as an advocacy specialist in Omaha. Abby Giambattista 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. Also added is Traci Johns, a part-time administrative assistant in the Lincoln office.
- Director Wyvill reported that the agency is still focusing on healthcare access in Nebraska, and specifically on concerns that appropriate communication access has not been provided in the hospital setting and in clinics with Nebraska Medicine. If this doesn't improve there may be a potential interim study and legislation in the next session introduced to address some of the issues identified in the medical setting.

Agency Updates

DHHS- Div. of Behavioral Health - Ms. Linda Wittmuss

- Strategic Plan 2021 – the draft strategic plan is complete and with the CEO now. It is different in that it integrates DHHS-wide by focusing on influence, integration, inclusion, innovation and improvements that are data-driven. Items in the work plan include a stigma reduction campaign and evaluating the impact of the expansion of Medicaid including how it affects the funding on the non-Medicaid side of behavioral health. There are also plans to move towards more value-based contracting.
- Legislative Session – there has been a number of bills that deal with technology and for the most part bills so far have been evaluated and found to be protecting consumer rights.
- Also being considered is the Regional Center, corrections and commune-based services, specifically defining their roles and how they can best fit together to provide the best system of care.

Mr. Benjamin Clancy

- Mr. Clancy shared that he left CHI in October and moved into private practice and is very busy right now.

Nebraska Regional Program - Ms. Diane Meyer

- Ms. Meyer shared that NRP had an activity for secondary students on personal care and mental health topics that Cody helped with. They also have chat nights where students can sign on and just interact with other students.
- NRP continues to hold virtual activities for students for each of the NRP regions as well as the state level. It is hard for students to get back onto Zoom in the evenings, but it is available for those that do want to. A recent activity was for coding which featured Nadmi Casiano, a deaf NASA engineer.
- Also NRP is working with WINK – Wendel Smith JR. to have him in for workshops. Also happening is a virtual conference for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing to support success for children with hearing loss.

CHI Report - Ms. Kathleen Valle

- Due to COVID, all meetings and workshops have been put on hold so that they can dedicate all resources to COVID patients. Also due to the pandemic, a few ASL interpreters have decided that it is a good time to retire. They are hoping to get agreements settled with a few new interpreters soon.

Nebraska Department of Education – Ms. Sue Czaplewski

- A number of activities have been held online, one recently with CJ Jones, an actor.
- A number of people are working on LB569 LEAD-K bill and initial plans are beginning for a transition summit this summer, hopefully to be held in person at UNL.

Ms. Tracey Minto

- Ms. Minto reported that it has been hectic with clients and that she is currently serving them through telehealth and working from home for the last few months.

Nebraska VR – Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell

- Currently, all VR staff is working from home and will continue to do so while the dial is in the red. As the dial decreases, more and more staff will be transitioning back to the office. Clients can come to the office when the dial is in the yellow.
- In the fall, staff was updated on changes in policies and eligibility determinations for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Prior eligibility was determined using an audiology calculating tool. Instead, Nebraska VR is now focusing on three areas: Does the person have a disability? Does the person have a barrier to employment or to their everyday living? Could the person benefit from VR services? These are the questions that are being used to determine eligibility

now so that everybody is treated equally rather than being treated differently based on their hearing ability or disability.

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

- Next meeting date May 13th (Omaha).
 - August 17 – Tuesday (Lincoln)
 - November 11th – Thursday (Omaha)

The meeting adjourned at 3:31 pm.