

Minutes
East Central DHHS Advisory Committee
September 21, 2010

Attendance: Emily Smith Lundberg, Ernie Watson, Brenda Hommerding, Michelle Isham, Beth Shultz

Guest: Marty Barnum, Christy Broll

Absent: Jody Gertken-Teter, Rebecca Crowell, Linda Henrickson, JoLynn Larson

Staff: Diane Leonard, Rich Diedrichsen, Carol Mermon, Jenny Robinson (interpreter), Staci Lahr (note taker)

Meeting was called to order by Emily Smith Lundberg, chairperson; introductions were made and minutes from last meeting were reviewed and approved. Beth motioned to approve the minutes, Brenda seconded this motion.

MCDHH Report:

Michelle: Recently a task force team was developed to look at why deaf and hard of hearing individuals are not getting the jobs they should be getting. This task force will also focus on the transition population (young adults 18-21 years of age)

Additionally, the housing situation now has caused some concern. Generally, there have been more foreclosures, however, agencies and other resources available to assist individuals experiencing this problem are not accessible to deaf and hard of hearing population.

Currently the Deaf Mentor program has limited resources. In response to this, a pilot program is now in place. Two families are now incorporating video technology in their mentoring experience. This will reduce expenses and time required related to travel

Greater MN Assessment Services has been cut at this time, however, Bruce did mention that at this time the program is currently suspended.

Mary Hartnett described a new website program which will be launched in October call *Make Your Case*. The program will be a resource for people to learn how to advocate for themselves especially with regards to legislative processes. This is also information and tips related to captioning videos on the website as well. Additionally, Mary had her intern collect information related to laws and policies directly related to the deaf and hard of hearing population. This is posted on the website as well for people to read and review. Lastly, Mary is encouraging people to contact candidates currently running for political office and encourage them to caption their advertisements. They are now required by law to do this.

Political debates around the state are captioned and posted on the following website: www.theuptake.org

MRS Update and Information-Jerry Pouliot

Diane: Diane provided information and updates on behalf of Jerry Pouliot, who was not able to attend the meeting due to scheduling conflicts. Diane mentioned that any concerns regarding the MN Relay Service should be directed to Jerry.

Per the information from Jerry, Diane also reported that TTY relay usage is decreasing. MN Relay is now providing VCO service, speech to speech and captioning. Additionally MN Relay and the TED Staff were present at the State Fair this year.

Lastly, MN Relay has been working with county communication centers with regards to emergency communication (911 dispatch). They would like to make a notation if a particular residence includes any deaf residents so they can effectively communicate in emergency situations.

DHHS Challenges and Plan for 2011:

Carol: Carol began her discussion by thanking the advisory committee members for their time and involvement. She paid special attention to Michelle for her additional work with MCDHH.

Carol explained that as a result of the last legislative session, the Department of Human Services has experienced a cut of 17.5 million dollars. More specifically, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (employs 49 people) target for budget cuts is \$350,000.

Several people have retired or resigned recently. In the past vacant positions continued to hold a “slot” but now often positions are being cut and funding is no longer available for positions that become vacant. For example, Lisa Hennen has decided to leave the division. Her position cannot currently be filled so as a result, Rich is serving as a regional manager and a consultant for the west central area. This model of merging or combining positions is emerging throughout the state; it is not exclusive to St. Cloud.

The southern region has experienced a retirement and two resignations. Additionally the two southern offices (Rochester and Mankato) will be merged into one office which will be located in Mankato.

As a result of these changes, response time to consumers and clients may be slower. Also, there are less state cars available at this time which will reduce the amount of travel staff is able to do. Staff will also continue to use technology such

as video phones and other resources as much as possible to continue to do their work and deliver services as much as possible.

At this time, staff needs to prioritize who can be served. Historically DHHSD has tried to serve everyone at all stages of life. We will continue to provide services to a range of people but we will need to focus on meeting basic needs first. Who will receive service will be based on their vulnerability and immediate needs such as housing, food, health care or employment. At times staff may need to turn down requests, clients, or agencies. We do, however, need to remain in contact with other agencies and services providers so we do not become an island but rather continue to work collaboratively with others in order to provide the best service possible.

St. Cloud has had to relinquish one of their state cars. This has required additional coordination and cooperation from staff members. Additionally the Greater MN Assessment Service program has been suspended at this time. Bruce has gone to Children's Mental Health to discuss how to meet the needs of consumers.

Brenda asked how VOA was related and Carol explained that VOA focuses on counseling services. Michelle also added that VOA is paid for their services by health insurance provided by parents or schools. GMAS, however, does not charge for their services.

As previously mentioned, the Deaf Mentor Program is based on face to face and MCDHH is working with us on a model to incorporate video phone technology. This has not been done much in the past since face to face contact is ideal; however, in rural areas this face to face contact is unrealistic at this time.

Housing issues and potential foreclosures has not been a noticeable common statewide issue for the deaf and hard of hearing population currently being served by DHHSD. One reason for this could be that many people currently being served rent rather than own residential property. DHHSD, however, will continue to try to educate housing agencies and other resources available.

Ernie asked if the VOA program is in fear of being cut in the near future. Carol responded that she was not aware of anything like that happening but at this time, anything is possible.

Ernie also asked how the recent cuts have impacted the metro area compared to greater MN. He finds that often people need to relocate to the metro area in order to receive the services they need. This is often an unfeasible option for families. Additionally, she did add that the metro has experienced several direct losses and cuts as well including positions and programs.

Ernie also reported that the state wide conference for DHH teachers has been cut. DHH teachers are being encouraged to attend the Charting the Seas

conference. Often, however, there is not much focus on DHH students during this conference. Carol asked if teachers were seeing an emerging role of teachers becoming more like consultants rather than being able to offer direct services as they had in the past. Michelle commented that there is currently a licensure push that every special education teacher, including DHH teachers, would have a generic license. This is, however, unfeasible for DHH teachers since these positions require so many special skills especially with regards to communication access.

Rich mentioned that he has presented on technology during the Charting the Seas conference in the past and his workshops have been well attended. He also mentioned that conference planners have had to seek additional grants to offer funding as a result of cuts so they would be able to offer the program this year.

Regional Report

Rich: The most significant change to the St. Cloud office at this time is Lisa Hennen's resignation which has also resulted in the West Central Consultant position to be currently frozen. In response, Diane is now covering McLeod and Meeker county while Rich is working to serve the remaining 9 counties in the West Central region. Rich currently has the dual role of regional manager and consultant. It has been difficult to outreach to West Central region as a result of lack of time and funding. Although video phone and email are sometimes effective options to connect with people, face time is sometimes necessary. The Central office has tried to cut costs related to travel by ride sharing whenever possible. Rich did emphasize that consumers should not hesitate to continue to request information/service even though cuts have been made. Staff will make every effort to meet the needs of consumers.

Diane: Diane is currently serving 13 counties. She recently developed a letter and informational brochure for her upcoming all day training event happening on November 17th. The information was sent to various agencies and organizations inviting people to participate. This year the training will be held in St. Cloud.

SNAPS will be hosting their fall event on October 17th. The event will include pumpkin painting and other family activities.

Diane is co-presenting a workshop titled *Sign Me Proud* on October 21st. The target audience for this workshop is education interpreters and DHH teachers. Currently they have enough interpreters registered but are looking for more teachers to participate.

Diane has been involved in the Disability Awareness Task Force. They have two upcoming events:

- September 29th Dinner and a movie: *Front of Class* (tickets can be purchased by contacting the Independent Living Center)

- October 28th Celebration of Abilities (annual event)
 - Can Do Canines

Diane has also been working with the Stearns County Emergency Management Group to discuss ways to help different population groups should a need arise.

Announcements – All Members

Rich: October 5th 6-7:30pm HLAA will be hosting the St. Cloud Fire Department. They will discuss their work and issues specifically related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

There are also several interpreter training and development workshops currently available. Anyone interested can contact Jenny for more information and registration. Beth Schultz is also a good contact person for interpreters.

Brenda: Brenda reported that the June SNAPS event was a success. Mary Harnett presented and families also had the opportunity to meet and socialize. SNAPS is tentatively planning a roller skating event for November. A similar event was hosted last year and was well attended.

This past July the MN Hands and Voices national conference was held locally. There was record breaking attendance at the conference. Brenda continues to connect with families mostly via phone. She will also continue to look for opportunities to increase her knowledge and training. Currently Brenda services 5 counties including: Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, Morrison, and Wright

Schedule for Next Meeting – January 2011

The next meeting is scheduled for January 18th, 2011 from 4:30pm-6:30pm at the East-Central DHHS Office, meeting room

*The meeting adjourned at 6:12 pm.