

## Southwest Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 4, 2011

1:00 – 2:30 pm – LeSueur Room of the Intergovernmental Building

Present: Roberta Johnson, chair; Howard Rosten, Laurie Palesotti, Curt Slater, Sharon Schwab.

DHHS Staff present: Tracy Bell, Jerry Pouliot, Jenny Stenner, Bruce Hodek.

Interpreters: Stephen Medicott, Sharisse Leier.

Roberta opened the meeting as chair. Introductions, and additions to agenda.

Future meetings will be held in the LeSueur Room. It was needed to reduce the number of Advisory Committee meetings due to the budget and short staff. Instead we will meet two times a year face to face, and the other two times a year, via email updates.

Bruce reports that we are having budget challenges. He encouraged members to make relationships with local legislators – they vote on budget cuts. Let them know that services are valued, as DHHS is one of very few who provide services in 87 counties.

Bruce gave members a presentation on the history of DHHS.

MCDHH:

Bruce clarified that each AC has one representative to MCDHH and is responsible to lobby for the needs and services of Minnesotans with a hearing loss. State employees are not allowed to lobby because they work for the governor, and are required to follow what the governor instructs. MCDHH is independent and they have a little more power to advocate services for programs.

The Governor will announce his budget plans on February 15.

Bruce is concerned about services to deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind individuals. He encouraged talking with your MCDHH representative to voice your concerns. Representatives report to Mary Hartnett – she reports to the MCDHH board. Discussions from Advisory Committee meetings can be brought to MCDHH through the MCDHH representative.

Roberta says she appreciates relationship with VRS and DHHS, especially with Terry Tauger in meeting the mental health needs of clients, as well as doing some disability awareness with DHHS.

Bruce reports that DHHS has cut almost a million dollars in the past three years, lost four staff, and closed an office (Rochester). Staff have to drive further. Sometimes staff have to say no, or wait. Staff are overwhelmed, and the staff are trying to prioritize and reorganize their work and services. It is too early to say if DHHS will have staff cuts.

DHHS has 2.1 million in grants –do we cut the grants, reduce them or leave them? 11% cuts with DHS are coming this year. DHS got hit the hardest because DHS is the largest state agency. We don't know when the cuts will hit us. Tax payers expect measurable outcomes , if we cannot show or demonstrate results, funds are affected.

Technology has gone a long way – facebook, twitter, but DHS is holding back, how do we combine technology with the work?

RM update – hired two consultants – Jenny Stenner and Jerry Pouliot – as temporary consultants. They were hired to help catch up services in the 29 county southern Minnesota.

Jenny and Jerry discussed their work – clients served (human service needs), and SW MN deaf community has their monthly gatherings, and working on establishing the similar concept in SE MN.

Community activities-

Deaf Awareness: Culture & Language – will be tomorrow, February 5, 2011 at 10:00 am at South Central Service Cooperative with Bob Westerhaus presenting.

An OASI (Office Administrative Support Intermediate) will be hired, hopefully within the next couple of weeks. Nancy, our TED Specialist has picked up the counties in SE MN – and is serving 29 counties. Terry Tauger will continue to serve 29 counties in Southern MN.

Bruce added that there is a soft hire freeze – only approved essential work can be hired. We had to go through the department to be approved – we had to explain why the OASI position is important – this person answers phones, attends to walkins, provides support to staff. It is our goal to fill this position by March 1.

Updates form Advisory Committee members

Roberta – Deanna Steffensmeier who is a VR counselor from St. Peter – will work with an intern who is deaf from MSU, Jesse Rushton. He will work with VR services for six months, and he will provide services to deaf, hearing, and hard of hearing consumers. Jesse is starting next week and he previously was a special education teacher.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) also has a soft hire freeze. Jean Witty, manager for DEED in Mankato area will be retiring in June. Issues closed for eligibility. They have one category for eligibility closed and applicants are going on a waiting list.

Roberta applied to be on the MCDHH board as the SW representative – sent application to Secretary of State office, waiting to hear from the appointing authority. Bruce says it is very important to feedback from the Advisory Committee and inform the MCDHH board.

Howard Rosten – he was accepted for training to obtain an assistive technology practitioner certificate supported by a grant through VR via the University of Wisconsin – Stout. He will be taking online classes for two years. SMILES is involved with Minnesota agrability programs . This is supported by VRS and U of M. He does work with DHHS on hearing demos, and has a very good partnership working with Tracy and Nancy. ACCESS program through Community Education is providing ASL class- five weeks on Mondays.

Laurie Palesotti – Thanked DHHS for the wonderful ice skating event on January 12. This was the 11<sup>th</sup> year and over 100 participants were at the event.

Family get away weekend is March 18-19 in Mankato. This will be the 11<sup>th</sup> year, and 25 families will be coming from the region. Parents and children both have their own sessions. This year, Tracy, Jenny and Jerry will be doing a panel for the parents. Sara Gerdts will come teach sign language; Joyce Atchison will talk with the children about “making friends”. This year is the last year to do the event annually. After this year, this event will be held every other year. The event costs \$60 per family and includes one night in a hotel and two meals. They are in need to pay for speaker, food, etc. and need volunteers with the children.

MCDHH alerts – encourage people to sign up for MCDHH alerts. Sign up on the MCDHH website – [www.mncdhh.org](http://www.mncdhh.org).

Flood awareness in the spring.

TV captioning coverage will RFP the captioning dollars next year will be some dollars for new TV stations Moorhead – not enough CC coverage – they were concerned about flooding, TV captioning. ND is the TV station – through Bruce and Amy, they convince TV stations to close-caption their news and emergency broadcasts.

We ran out of time to finish the list of agenda items. Roberta suggested we meet for two hours in August. Members agreed.

Next meeting on e-mail will be sometime in May. Next face to face meeting is on August 26 from 1 pm to 3 pm.