

Department of Rehabilitation Services
Counseling & Interpreting Units
67 Prospect Avenue, 3rd Floor
Hartford, CT 06106-2980

Advisory Board Meeting: September 10, 2012

Minutes

Members in Attendance:

Luisa Soboleski, Board Chairperson
Raymond DeRosa, Parent of student enrolled in public school
Amy Mirizzi, Designee, Department of Public Health
Jane Whitehead, Designee, Department of Developmental Services
Edward Peltier, Executive Director, American School for the Deaf, Ex-Officio Member
Jeff Bravin, Deaf Member
Mary Silvestri, Deaf Member
Mary Lynch, Hard of Hearing Member, Office of State Comptroller
Bernice Zampano, Designee, Department of Labor

Members Not Present:

Astread Ferron-Poole, Designee, Department of Social Services
William Rivera, Designee, Department of Children & Families
Lucy Trusock, Parent of student enrolled at ASD
Colleen Hayles, Designee, Department of Education
Susan Pedersen, President of CCOSD, Ex-Officio Member
Gloria White, Deaf Member
Matt Ranelli, Parent of student in oral education program

Vacant Positions:

Designee from DMHAS
Consultant for Hearing Impaired Programs, Ex-Officio
Otolaryngologist licensed to practice in the State of Connecticut
Deaf / Hard of Hearing Member
Deaf / Hard of Hearing Member

BRS/CDHI Staff Present:

Amy Porter, Commissioner
Sara Gerhold, Interpreter Coordinator
Melissa Dennis, CDHI Counselor
MaryAnn Dayton-Fitzgerald, CDHI Counselor

Guests Present:

none

Interpreters:

Cyndi Ward
Kate Gavigan

CART Reporter:
Diana Huntington

Call to Order, Acceptance of Agenda, Minutes and Adjournment Time:

Luisa Soboleski called meeting to order at 1:44. Acceptance of the agenda. Acceptance of minutes from April meeting was tabled, as the members did not have a copy available for review.

Structure of Deaf Services within the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

Luisa Soboleski and Amy Porter discussed the organizational structure of the new Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and how deaf services fit into this structure. Both stressed the point that the services have not changed, and that the Department continues to provide the same level of service that CDHI had provided prior to the consolidation.

DORS is operating under a one-year interim structure. This will give the Department leadership time to solicit input from various stakeholder groups and make some informed decision about the future structure of the agency. In the meantime, the current structure has the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Counseling Unit tied to the counselors in the old Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, and the Interpreting Unit tied to the Department's new Business Unit. This division of services provides each unit with the support that they need to do their jobs.

Board members requested a simple organizational chart that focused primarily on where the deaf and hard of hearing services fit in the new structure. This will be provided at the next meeting.

There was concern about the "identity" for deaf and hard of hearing services. There was also concern that the community continued to need a "voice", and that we need to focus on communication. A second Town Hall Meeting will be held on October 4th from 4:00 to 6:00 to hear from the leaders of the deaf and hard of hearing communities on these issues.

Statutes

There are questions about the statutes that used to govern the work of CDHI. Board members are interested in what changes, if any, were made to the statutes. Commissioner Porter indicated that the statutes remained unchanged in most areas, with the exception of the name of the agency, the reporting structure and the role of the Board which has changed to an advisory role.

The Board initially was requesting that Commissioner Porter reach out to the Governor about the statutes, but no specific suggestions were made. The Board then decided that they need to review the current statutes and make some decisions about whether anything needs to be addressed. The statutes are all available on the DORS website. Commissioner Porter will email Mary Silvestri, who will send them out to the Board members and solicit any input on necessary changes or areas where the statutes may have changed without anyone being aware of the changes.

Budget

There was discussion about the state budget process. Questions were posed about new initiatives and new funding. From a state perspective, the budget process for SFY14 and 15 is just beginning. There is also the ability for the Board to go directly to the legislature. There was also discussion about the different funding streams coming into the new Department, including federal funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation and Disability Determination programs. Board members were trying to understand why the staff from the old Bureau of Rehabilitation Services could not provide levels of support for the programs previously housed at CDHI, so the different funding streams were described. The organization needs to be sure that staff funded by federal programs is only working on those programs. There was also discussion about the willingness of the Department to apply for grants, which is definitely something that fits with the Department's philosophy. Commissioner Porter encouraged board members to share grant opportunities if they saw them.

Interpreting Department Report

Sara Gerhold provided an update on the Interpreting Department. Sara reported that the number of office staff is the same as at the last meeting, and there are 41 interpreters right now. Twenty-nine of those interpreters are represented by the union (two classified as part-time permanent or PTP). Seven of the interpreters can provide legal interpreting, including assignments at court, police or any other area that is of a legal nature.

Implementation of Avianco, the interpreter scheduling software, is still going well. There was recently a link between Avianco and the state's billing system, which will make billing easier.

Sara also reported that they are in the process of collecting statewide interpreter registrations, as required by law. This process should be finished by the beginning of October and the registration cards will then be mailed out. She also mentioned that they are getting supports from the business unit and also working with the DORS liaison for the website.

Sara presented a separate report from the Interpreting Unit (see attached).

Questions from Board members related to the availability of interpreters, reasons for turning down assignments, relationship with Family Services Woodfield, and travel time.

Counseling Department Report

Melissa Dennis and MaryAnn Dayton-Fitzgerald joined the meeting to provide an update on the activities of the Counseling Department. They describe their services as strength based, and stress the importance of partnerships with other agencies. The two counselors continue to cover the entire state, to the extent possible, as well as fielding phone calls, walk-ins, and crisis intervention.

They have been collecting data by hand. They presented data on their activities over the past 11 months, with session counts as follows:

- Therapy: 1139 sessions
- Case Management: 1039 sessions
- Advocacy: 454 sessions
- Information: 457 sessions

- Referrals: 211 sessions
- Court: 57 sessions
- DCF: 77 sessions
- Meetings: 241 sessions

Board members asked which areas of the state were the most underserved, and the counselors reported, based on their experience, that the northeast corner, Waterbury, Torrington.

There was also a recommendation that the Department look more closely at the counseling numbers and the unmet need and consider a proposal to the Governor. Alternatively, the Board could approach the legislature with their own proposal.

Board Membership

There are currently five vacancies. It was requested that there be a discussion on the status of these vacancies at the next Advisory Board meeting.

Executive Committee Report: None.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

There was some discussion about new technology, particular a new application that translates sign language (Portable Sign Language Translator – PSLT). The discussion included some of the benefits and some of the controversy about using technology, particularly in educational settings.

Also, there was interest in hearing more at the next meeting about the activities of CCOSD.

Announcements:

- Jeff Bravin announced that the CCOSD Open Forum, to be held Saturday, November 3rd.

Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 3:31 pm. Next meeting scheduled for November 5, 2012.