



**Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities  
Developmental Disabilities Advisory Committee  
Meeting Summary – July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Larry Bram, Co-Chair • Karen Morgret, Co-Chair**

**Attendees:** Betty Bahadori; Larry Bram; Carly Clem; Rosemary DiPietro; Claire Funkhouser; Susan Goodman; Mary Keyser; Shawn Lattanzio; Betsy Luecking; Jenn Lynn; Laurie Lyons; Kim Mayo; Linda McMillan; Jennifer Mizrahi; Karen Morgret; Sara O’Neil; Gloria Odongo; Reda Sheinberg; Beth Shuman; Jeneva Stone

**Federal, State and Local Updates on Services and Budgets**

Karen Morgret reported Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) remains closed to the public. Their budget outlook is not good and they will most likely not fill open positions through this upcoming fiscal year. Individuals with significant disabilities that are in the Category 2 wait list were previously going to wait for up to 36 months for services. At this time, DORS is not expecting to be able provide services for those in Category 2 for the foreseeable future.

Shawn Lattanzio, Local Behavioral Health Authority (LBHA), reported Jefferson School, a private special education day school and residential treatment center in Frederick County, will be closing its doors on August 31<sup>st</sup>. The center offered 45-beds and served day students ages 12 to 21 and residents ages 13 to 21 with emotional and behavioral disabilities. For those in the residential treatment center, some individuals will be returning home while others will be going to other residential centers. Shawn has been assisting Montgomery County families with residential placements and she reported all have been placed at this time. Those in the school will be looking for other programs. Shawn noted that Good Shepherd Services, which served children with Autism and with developmental disabilities, as well as Adventist Health Care have also closed over the last several years. Since she started her position with LBHA the state has lost 220+ residential treatment beds. Jenn Lynn, Upcounty Community Resources (UCR), reported she is receiving e-mails from parents that are considering relocating their children to Frost School or Laurel Hall. Families are scared and there are not many programs to choose from that serve children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disabilities and autism spectrum disorders.

It was reported that the 4% rate increase for DD Community Services funding temporarily started July 1<sup>st</sup>, but due to the current pandemic and loss in revenues the funding could be cut from the budget.

Beth Shuman, Senior Legislative Aide, Office of Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, said the Council will be meeting over the summer to discuss this issue as well as other issues. Several focus groups will be convened and then they will introduce recommendations to the Council. Beth noted that the County did not cut the DD supplement for its FY21 operating budget.

**Coordination of Community Services (CCS) Updates**

**Medical Management & Rehabilitation Services (MMARS):** Sara O’Neil, DDA QE Analyst II, reported that MMARS is figuring out how to successfully provide all services virtually by using Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype. They are still providing weekly calls to all clients, especially if the individual has an HRST score of 3 or higher. The TY timeline for TY19s has been extended until September 30<sup>th</sup>. Of their TY19s, 10 are in the waiver, 2 have declined services and the remaining are trying to find providers. Provider visits are all virtual at this time, although at some point they will become face-to-face.

**Community Support Network (CSN), Montgomery County Health & Human Services:** Rosemary DiPietro, Program Manager, reported CCSs are working with their caseloads and making a greater effort to meet via video conferencing. She has not received any reports regarding community spread of COVID-19 amongst provider agencies and she is taking that as a good sign. All TYs are placed.

**Total Care Services (TCS):** Gloria Odongo, Director of Quality Enhancement, reported they continue to provide weekly check-ins and to use an online platform to ensure those they serve are receiving needed services. It can be challenging not having in-person meetings as you may not become aware of certain issues if you were in the home. CCSs are working off of information received from providers. Some individuals have opted for bi-weekly or monthly check-ins. Some providers notify TCS if an individual they serve has tested positive for COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive. Sometimes other health conditions cause them to be admitted to the hospital. All necessary paperwork has been submitted for TYs. Their TY19s look good. For TY21, they have 21 students – 17 have waivers and Service Funding Plans (SFP) have been submitted.

**Service Coordination, Inc. (SCI):** Laurie Lyons, Program Manager, introduced herself to the Committee. She will share data at the next meeting. She noted that SCI currently has 14 CCSs providing services in Montgomery County.

Larry noted it is remarkable how much progress has been made in the last few months considering how overwhelming it was in the beginning. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said it is a testament to the wonderful advocates and providers who are doing all they can to take care of people with developmental delays.

#### **Discussion re: Montgomery County Public Schools**

Jennifer Mizrahi, RespectAbility, first stated that Montgomery County is one of the best performing counties in the country for employment of persons with disabilities. Pre-COVID, over half of adults with disabilities that are of working age had employment, which is higher than the 36% national average. Jennifer attributed one of the reasons for the county's high employment rate to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Special Education program.

From Jennifer's personal perspective, when COVID-19 closed schools the contract signed by the teacher's union was highly problematic. Contracted teachers were not obligated to provide live classes. Many students with disabilities, including her family, had very few live interactions with teachers. All assignments would be given on a Monday and were to be completed by Friday. While some teachers may have offered Zoom sessions for students who needed assistance, those sessions were not always consistent. The sessions also potentially conflicted with other teachers Zoom sessions so the student could not attend. As a result, children with disabilities have had increased mental health issues and low participation rates. The potential long-term outcome is that students will drop out of school. MCPS has had a historically high graduation rate for students with disabilities.

The MCPS back-to-school-plan has not been finalized yet and they are still seeking public comments. The MCPS Fall 2020: Reimagine, Reopen, Recover Guide provides an overview of a few of the recovery models the district is considering at this time. This is just a draft guide and MCPS will continue to amend and improve upon these recommendations as it receives feedback from the community. Please read the message from Superintendent here: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/publicinfo/community/school-year-2019-2020/community-update-20200711.html>. Feedback can be submitted here: <http://mcpsweb.wufoo.com/forms/submit-feedback-for-draft-2020-fall-recovery-plan/>.

The current expectation is that students with developmental disabilities will have a more structured school day that will provide some continuity. There will be one primary computer database for parents to assist their children. MCPS will have a staggered start time with the majority of students not starting in-person at the beginning of the school year but attending online. Jennifer has real concerns that students will not attend virtual programming and this could have very significant long-term issues for young people with disabilities. It will be a particular challenge for single parent families, immigrant families, and families that do not have good computer or internet access.

Legally, a child can stay in school until they are 21 if they have not finished their graduation requirements. Most families with children who have disabilities are not aware of this option. Jennifer suggested this may be a time for students with disabilities to change to a half day schedule and intentionally plan to take an extra year. This may help reduce the mental health impact of what is bound to be a very chaotic school year ahead. She understands that this idea means potentially thousands of students would be taking an extra year in school and this would have an impact on a number of cascading issues. This time for students with disabilities has been incredibly hard as most of their actions have been over the internet without in-person special education teachers and paraeducators. The community needs to proactively think through all of the implications of lack of social content, lack of interaction, lack of educational knowledge. Jennifer noted that other counties across the country have a 20% no-show where a student did not attend any classes.

Jennifer suggested that MCPS or the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) purchase rights to various online educational programs such as Khan Academy or Coursera which would be helpful resources. She also suggested that parent resource centers provide more assistance to parents as they navigate these crises. The current draft plan offers a staggered school reopening with the youngest children beginning at the end of August and other students may not attend in-person until the end of November. Jennifer suggested making November the start date for those students and extending the school year through the summer so they can receive the full benefit of in-person classes. It will be important to have the federal government provide funding to pay for masks and hand sanitizer. There will be some new federal legislation that will provide funding opportunities and resources. Senator Chris Van Hollen has indicated that his office will assist.

Teachers are required to be present for all Zoom meetings. Jennifer questioned how staff will be designated to attend if a group needs to meet via Zoom to discuss a project

Betsy noted that the mental health crisis goes across the board for all ages and populations. Shawn said the suicide rate has increased. There have been three suicides in the middle and high schools over the last six weeks. Beth said the Council has appropriated funding to hire six clinicians for the County's expanding mobile crisis teams. She said we need models that can reach the entire county and provide immediate support.

Betsy added that the Commission on Veterans Affairs has been working to address the high suicide rate amongst Veterans .In 2018 there were 102 male and 9 female suicides. Montgomery County has 42,000 Veterans. Betsy said there are also suicides amongst first responders who are vulnerable during this time. It is hard to stay positive with the pandemic and financial crisis and higher unemployment rate.

Shawn said the Washington Post recently had an article regarding a significant increase in opioid use since the coronavirus pandemic started. (Article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/07/01/coronavirus-drug-overdose/>). Shawn is part of BTheOne which is a group of organizations and government agencies that works to prevent suicide, mental health concerns, and substance misuse in teenagers. The group that is working to look at different opportunities and ways to reach out to teenagers. They have added the option to chat or text and have increased those services with Every-Mind and LifeLine. BTheOne website: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/btheone/>. Beth said the County is also working to increase that availability as well as providing communication in multiple languages.

Susan Goodman, Parent, said at the beginning of the pandemic, TVs would have continuous scrolling text on the bottom with numbers to call for substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health. She suggested the scrolling text be used again.

Larry said tele-mental health has shown to be an effective way to provide services. There is a higher rate of attendance as individuals do not have to travel. Beth said this method has also proved effective in the immigrant communities within the County's clinics. Larry noted that tele-mental health services are set to expire when the state of emergency expires. Shawn said there has been discussion that services will continue through October although there has been no official word on an extension.

Karen asked if EEVs for Personal Supports will go into effect the end of this year and if CCSs will be distributing fobs. Rosemary said they have not received any direction since the COVID-10 pandemic started, but they are going through the introductory process for fobs, which will be assigned to those who need them. Individuals in Personal Supports will need to be identified as having their own phone or in need of a fob. Then the CCS agency will have to arrange for the individual to pick up the fob. Rosemary also said it is her understanding that there will be no delay in the initiation of this tracking tool or payment. Sara said their Community First Choice program already uses one-time passcode devices so MMARS has a plan on how to use the fobs for Personal Supports. She nor her Director have heard any more information about the fobs nor have they heard of a delay in implementation. Karen said that due to a federal mandate, these devices are required to be used in order to determine billing and how providers will be paid. From a provider standpoint, the fob will be used to verify what time staff begins and ends providing supports. It can be difficult to track if support services overlap. Karen also said providers are currently billing through PCIS2 but will be transitioning over to LTSS during the fall.

### **Provider Updates and Announcements**

Jenn Lynn reported UCR is adapting many of their programs. For example, as their employment services cannot be completed in the community, their employment staff person who works five hours a week has been providing services one-on-one with the individual in their garage, backyard or park. The individual works on soft skills based on their level of interest. This may mean folding towels if they want to work at a hotel or creating a fake table setting if they want to work in a restaurant. Jenn Lynn sent an email to members about this adapted program and she already has 25 interested individuals. She continues to have a hard time offering respite care. UCR is offering a free Create and Sip virtual painting event for caregivers. Many caregivers have been attending UCR's therapeutic art programs with their young adult. They are still deciding how to offer their annual 5K fundraising event which is scheduled for August 29<sup>th</sup>. The UCR Board will make a final decision. They do have some virtual options to offer if they do not have an in-person 5K. Claire Funkhouser, Parent, said she knows of several agencies that have had very successful virtual fundraisers and galas. Jenn Lynn has applied for a position on the County's Policing Advisory Commission.

Larry reported EasterSeals has started to open some of their child development centers. The first center to open was in Northern Virginia. The inter-generational center in Silver Spring opened on July 6<sup>th</sup> at greatly reduced capacity with 27 children. They expect to have 36 children total enrolled by the end of the week. Due to the permanently reduced capacity limits, between 30 to 40 families will not have a spot come September. EasterSeals is looking to possibly offer hybrid programs tentatively called EasterSeals At Home which would provide a curriculum with classroom materials and teacher availability. They are submitting a grant application to the County Council. EasterSeals has locations in Maryland, D.C., and Virginia and all three states have different rules and guidelines. D.C. is requiring that every classroom have three staff with reduced capacity. At this point, the D.C. center may not open until September or October at the earliest. For adult day services, Medicaid is paying between 80% to 85% of their rate, which covers 80% of the total cost. EasterSeals calls every person enrolled in adult day services they receive Medicaid or not. These calls, known as daily care connections, are provided by direct care professionals who call 200 people a day, 7 days a week. They also are offering Zoom meetings for individuals who are friends and offering virtual activities. EasterSeals provides assistance if the individual indicates that they need food, supplies, or health information. EasterSeals is only receiving adult day service payments from those receiving Medicaid. Medicaid is not allowing EasterSeals to enroll any new individuals at this time. They do not anticipate opening adult day services in-person until there is a vaccine. Even then in-person services would be provided at a lower capacity.

Reda Sheinberg, Parent, said her son is in Self-Directed Services and receives services from Integrated Living Opportunities (ILO) which provides virtual programming. He is finding it very hard to not go out to restaurants and movies. He has a job and works four hours a week. He is looking for other employment, but it is hard to do so virtually. Reda is involved with Transition Times Workshops held by the Arc of Montgomery County. They recently held a virtual program on guardianship and alternatives to guardianship presented by Ellen Callegary, Esq. (<https://callegarylaw.com/>). Reda expects the workshops to be held virtually in the upcoming year.

Claire reported the Transition Workgroup met prior to this Committee meeting. The pilot project was funded, but due to the pandemic the funding may be used in a different way to address barriers to transition, especially as COVID-19 is the number one barrier this year. Claire will have more to report at the next Committee meeting.

Jeneva Stone, Parent, along with Monica Herring, Katie Larkin, and David Cross, have all been working to educate legislative members on transition issues for children who require one-on-one skilled nursing services, which DDA does not provide. They are working to have services between REM and DDA aligned to allow these individuals to stay at home. It is an incredibly complex issue given the way the programs are structured. Jeneva spent this last legislative session educating legislators and she has developed good relationships. She was invited to testify before the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families last November and is working with Senator Susan Lee's office. Jeneva plans to write an op-ed for the Baltimore Sun and will continue to bring these issues up when the Maryland General Assembly meets again the fall.

Betty Bahadori, Parent, said she is trying to be creative with her son and using alternative face masks such as face shields. It was suggested that her son try a neck gaiter which is slipped on and offer the neck and can be pulled up over the mouth and nose. Betsy ordered protective face shields online which may be easier to breathe through than a mask. Betty also shared that Community Support Services (CSS) has been very creative, conservative and successful in keeping their clients healthy and they offer a wide variety of Zoom activities. Some clients receive day services in the community, but they cannot be in the same shelter so staff are identifying places in various parks. Betty added that given the situation, some clients have surpassed expectations with managing routine changes, having to wear masks, and not being able to see family members.

Karen reported Treatment & Learning Centers (TLC) are offering virtual programs for their clients. They have a dance group that meets every other Thursday staffed by a dance instructor. They have also offered game night and cooking classes. Their job club meets five days a week and discusses different topics Monday through Friday.

The Committee approved the March 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes and the June 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes.

### **Announcements**

Larry announced the Committee will not meet in August. The next meeting will be held Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from 4p.m. to 5:30p.m. via Zoom. Instructions to be announced.

### **Respectfully Submitted,**

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

### **Next Meeting**

Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from 4pm to 5:30pm – via Zoom  
Instructions to attend will be included on the meeting agenda.