

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY MEETING: June 10, 2022
Hybrid Meeting

Welcome and Introductions

Members Present: Michelle Paonessa (Chair), Russ Goddard (Vice Chair), Kay Tyberg, Lori Leiman, Janette Fulton, Amy Letteri, Lee Sheffield, Mark Beall

ODHH Staff: Melissa Hawkins (Director), DeeDee Keiser, Ben Moonan, Denise Brown

Interpreters: Cindi Brown, Jessica Bentley – Sassaman

CART: Debbie Cunningham

Moderator: Nichole Wade

Review and Approval of Minutes:

The March 25, 2022 meeting minutes were reviewed. Russ Goddard made a motion to pass with no corrections. Janette Fulton seconded. Minutes were approved.

Department Reports:

Aging –

No verbal report

Education –

Eric Haggerty has been named the new Acting Secretary of Education. The Office for Dispute Resolution has put out a new parent guide on understanding special education due process. The Attract, Retain and Prepare Initiative by PDE is ongoing to try to address the educational staff shortage in PA.

Health –

Out of hospital births have increased. The EHDI Program was recently able to secure funding to purchase 10 pieces of hearing screening equipment to place with midwives who perform out of hospital births. This continues a multi-year effort to increase the hearing screening and reporting capabilities of PA midwives, bringing the total number of machines in the field to over

50. Out of hospital screenings and referrals have measurably increased as a result.

The 1-3-6 path was discussed. Infants are typically screened within 1 month of birth. If they don't pass, they are diagnosed within 3 months and if confirmed hearing loss, enrolled in Early Intervention or Family Support within 6 months.

The EHDI Program currently supports family education for children who are deaf/hard of hearing through age three via the Family Connections for Language and Learning (FCLL) program. The Program continues to offer support, TA, and education to hearing screeners and audiologists through follow-up nursing staff. FCLL also has a few adult deaf mentors who can mentor families and add a deaf perspective in addition to the parent mentor assigned to new parents of deaf children.

Department regulations are out of date so those are being updated and modernized and are on the summer agenda for approval.

Human Services – Office of Developmental Programs

June is DeafBlind Awareness Month

Monthly Communication Corner has tips on building relationships with those you support who are DeafBlind

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Advisory Committee published a guide to offer resources in one central location for those who support or care for someone who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind and receives supports from ODP.

Positive Approaches Journal will strive to feature resources, observations, and advancements that are relevant and timely to professionals and supporters through case studies, articles, interviews, and related academic sources. It will be published every 3 months.

Office of Long-Term Living has held multiple in-person drop-in sessions for participants in Community HealthChoices (CHC) Participant-Directed Services.

Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services - Beginning July 16, 2022, contacting "988" will connect individuals directly to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This is call or text.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program administered by DHS that provides assistance to low-income Pennsylvanians for home heating bills. Assistance is available for renters and homeowners.

Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is a temporary emergency program to help low-income families pay overdue water bills. This is a grant that you do not have to repay. It runs until September 30, 2023, or when funds are expended

Labor and Industry –

OVR:

The 2022 DHH Summer Academy program for DHH high school students in PA will take place at the Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC) in Johnstown from Sunday, July 17, 2022, to Friday, July 29, 2022. Currently 10 kids are enrolled but DHH high school students with open OVR cases can possibly still be accepted into the program. Truly amazing things happen at the academy- the kids will have a wonderful experience.

All OVR offices have been open to the public since April. The pandemic significantly affected the number of referrals to OVR, but they are slowly improving. OVR is working on expending the carryover funds on programs and services. Each OVR office has completed outreach plans.

My works program is an example of a preemployment opportunity. It involves summer work-based learning in a municipality. There are many other exciting projects going on.

There is a new Executive Director for OVR. There is also a new Director for Vocational Rehabilitation and for the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. Across the commonwealth, OVR is down over a hundred positions. They are all posted and in the process of being filled.

An acknowledgement was given to Melissa for winning the Governor's Award for Excellency. She received the award for her excellent work, especially during the pandemic.

ODHH:

Currently there are 709 state-registered interpreters and 46 provisional interpreters.

ODHH Hosted three separate townhall meetings on May 5th. They were well-attended and provided good feedback. The purpose was to see what services were needed and what strategic focus was needed. Key take away moments was more education for the community/providers and stakeholders. The community would like to see more communication come from our office on what we are doing. ODHH will work with the media and marketing team to create a strategic focus on outgoing communication and schedule a monthly training/workshop educational forum. They are a small team but are doing a tremendous amount of work, but people aren't always aware of it all. Another position was just approved to be added to the ODHH team.

Mt. Aloysius hosted the first in-person SSP training since the RFP's were awarded and the pandemic began. It was held the weekend of April 22, 23rd and 24th. The training was at full capacity and was very well received. The training for this month was canceled due to lack of participation. More SSPs are needed.

Public Comment:

Jessica Adams – COO of Deafstone services; no formal report but think the hybrid meeting is going well. Deafstone is struggling to get SSPs.

Matt Seeley – statewide independent living; spoke about issues with DHH and Deaf-Blind; suggested to possibly have two forums to talk about sensory disability issues

Nancy and Melissa proposed addition of public comment at end since it is allowed in other state meetings. Agenda changed to allow public comment after speakers for this meeting.

Guest Speaker:

Gerald Penna is a member of the PA Society of Advancement of the Deaf. He was one of the original members of the Act 57 stakeholders' group. A group is being convened to draft a plan this summer to look at Act 57 and will have presentations in the fall. He wants to make sure people know their rights and responsibilities with the law. The group will look to see who they can get to sponsor the bill after elections in the fall.

Guest Speaker:

Steve Pennington gave an update on ODHH funding report. One thing that frequently came up pre-COVID was the capacity of ODHH to fulfill the mission under the enabling statute. A work group was put together to discuss. Out of that discussion came a report that was submitted to the prior Secretary of Labor and Industry.

There is around 1.1 million PA DHH (9% of population). ODHH has 5 staff people with the new addition. Communication access by individuals that are DHH remains problematic. The various groups (Deaf, HH and DB) all have very different needs and characteristics – one size doesn't fit all. Steve went over the advocacy roles ODHH has. He also named the many other jobs ODHH is responsible for which include maintaining interpreter lists and collecting/distributing information. ODHH also provides staff support to the advisory council. The report recommended an additional person for Allentown as well as an additional person to work directly with the advisor council as well as more budgetary money to meet statutory requirements of ODHH.

Public Comment:

Michelle asked if Steve's report can be sent to circulate to the council members. Steve agreed to send.

Kay discussed how the group's dedication and work in advocating for D, HH and DB is critical in the state; many individuals are not familiar with where to go to, so this is an important part of ODHH. She mentioned that HLAA has 2 authors that recently released a new book called hear and beyond; can purchase on amazon. Talks about significances and tips about hearing loss, etc. She encourages everyone to read it.

Steve discussed how most advisory councils that are involved with provision of services to people with disabilities visit the Hill and talk to senators and house members. This advisory council doesn't need to recreate the wheel – there are resources to help.

Jerry agreed with Steve. There needs to be increased funding; need support services for CART services and interpreters and they are expensive; advisory council need to fight for this

Jessica thanked Steve for this report and would like a copy because her organization would like to help advocate for more money for ODHH; can't

imagine taking care of entire state with such small group of employees; so appreciative of their work

Ryan said he echoed what has been said. He suggested taking the report and turning it into white one pager paper from this advisory council and giving it to legislators; not once and done visit to legislators -need to do every few months especially before budget cycle; include data and stories

Matt agreed with all that was said and mentioned his organization would help; meeting with legislators is much easier now with zoom

Nancy commented on the excellent presentations; said a letter was sent 2 years ago and in 2015 to L&I no response but maybe we need to try legislation now; all needs are different so more help is needed like how other states do it; happy to help in any way to push this for growth

Amy clarified that a white paper is a condensed version of a longer document such as the report Steve and his committee wrote. She would be willing to put it together.

Michelle summarized that the council is making a survey to help the council collect data and help provide the group with action items for the future. A white paper is one thing the council will do. The survey will talk about services that people are getting as well as ones they'd like to have. It will be completely accessible. The council will work on it in executive work session after the council meeting.

Other:

Russ made a motion to close the meeting. Janette seconded.

Meeting was adjourned.

Next Council Meeting is on September 16, 2022.