**Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind Advisory Council**

**May 21, 2020**

**Zoom Video Conference**

**9:30-11:00**

**ATTENDEES**

**Board Members:** Spenser Weppler, Charlea Baker, Monica Hutt, Amelia Briggs, Laura Siegel, Katy Langevin, Morgan Tewksbury, Sherry Sousa, AJ Van Tassel, Rebecca Chalmers, Linda Hazard, Sharon Henry, Susan Kimmerly, Amy Williamson, Will Pendlebury

**Guests:**  Liz Perreault

**Interpreters:**  Kelly Decker, Kristal Hier, White Coat Captioning

**D/HH/DB Coordinator Position Hiring Update**

**Monica Hutt, DAIL Commissioner and Spenser Weppler, Council Chair**

Prior to the Coronavirus pandemic, DAIL had offered the position to the two finalist who declined taking the position. Since then, the State has imposed a freeze on all hiring at this time. Once this hiring freeze is lifted or DAIL is granted permission to hire, the position will be reposted, and another search will begin.

The reasons for the candidates declining the position differed, but both declined for personal reasons. One challenge is the lower salary a person makes in Vermont compared nationally for a similar position.

Once this position is filled, that person will be able to be the “point of contact” for the state for resources and collaboration. This position will also lead in creating an emergency preparedness plan, the driver card, and other statewide topics.

**Legislative Updates**

**Monica Hutt and Spenser Weppler**

In January, testimony was given to the legislature on a change in language for the D/HH/DB council to have a designated seat at the Hearing Loss Association of America, Vermont Chapter. This new language went through the House and is now sitting with the Senate.

The bill, H.312, for open captions in movie theaters, has not moved and is stagnant. The legislature would like business to make this available voluntarily without it being mandated by law. There is potential for this bill to still move forward. If it is included in the housekeeping bill. Monica Hutt will find out the status of this bill and report back to the council.

There isn’t any new information on the bill, S.137, relating to health insurance coverage for hearing aids at this time.

**Vermont Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (VTEHDI) Program Update**

**Linda Hazard**

A four-year grant application was submitted to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to fund a new VTEHDI Program data base. The program has recently received a four-year HRSA grant as well. Since these grants end in four years, it is imperative to plan beyond 2024.

The infant program is on target and has done well during these challenging times.

The birth to 5 program struggles with technical bandwidth and connectivity. Families are feeling fatigued trying to provide their children services remotely that they would normally get in person. Planning for in-person services have started. There is a meeting on May 26 to discuss funding and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) needs.

Birth to 3 services has experienced an impact from a Medicaid reimbursement reduction. This program is not sustainable without more funding. CIS grants have previously bridged that funding gap. There is a meeting coming up and once that meeting happens, Linda will come back to the council with more information.

All programs are offering services remotely, either by phone or online. Families prefer face to face but are making do during this time. There was only a couple of families that declined services until face to face is possible again.

**Nine East Networks Update**

**Linda Hazard and Susan Kimmerly**

For the Early Intervention Program, connectivity has been difficult for a couple of families.

School aged children, as of April 3, have been connecting with their teachers remotely. The challenges have been connecting with children whose parents are essential workers. It’s difficult to provide services to children who are in childcare.

The teachers are working at 80% and learned the tools to provide services to students remotely. Because of the decrease in hours worked, the revenues have dropped off and contracted hours were reduced. The program is unable to process new referrals currently and there are currently 10 new referrals. It has also highlighted the need to update tech equipment to do this better.

The benefits from providing services remotely are a reduction in time and money spent on traveling. Also, older kids tend to do well with remote learning.

The financial help that the network can utilize is the Payroll Protection Program. This can help keep staff on. The network is also looking at available grants and whatever other financial relief that can be found.

**Association Updates:**

**Vermont Association of the Deaf (VAD) – Laura Siegel**

* Laura provides weekly updates to VAD on Thursdays.
* There was a Vermont Public Radio interview about the difficulty to communicate while wearing masks.
* VAD is using social media to communicate with the deaf community.
* VAD has received many phone calls for hearing aids or help with tech support.
* Jacob Veeder resigned, and Alan Shapiro has stepped in.
* John Perone is a new VAD member.

Bill Hudson suggested utilizing the Assistive Technology program in Voc Rehab as a resource for technology. He will send the contact information to Laura.

**Hearing Loss Association of America, Vermont Chapter (HLAAVT) – Deb Baker and Rebecca Chalmers**

Most of the chapters work is done remotely so this change has not been difficult. The chapter currently participated in a national Zoom meeting that was very well done with a strong topic.

If people are interested in joining a national meeting, go to Hearingloss.org and sign up. It is an excellent resource. HLAAVT would like to host a similar meeting for the state.

One thing of concern is how to better coordinate programs and resources and how to better collaborate. In Vermont Department of Health (VDH), Sharon Muller can add links onto websites and would be a good resource and inroad for HLAAVT.

**Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) – Will Pendlebury**

Will has been on the VCIL Board for a couple of months now. VCIL has received $900,000 and will use some of it to provide more Meals on Wheels and support to Vermont Interpreter Referral Service (VIRS). Sarah Launderville is VCIL’s Executive Director and is very interested in supporting the deaf community. If the council has any thought on how this money should be used, contact Will and he will share that input to the VCIL board.

**COVID-19: Future Emergency Preparedness Discussion**

Spenser Weppler met with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other states to discuss how a preparedness plan would have been helpful during this pandemic for the HH and DB populations. The FEMA representative was concerned about rural, disadvantaged families. FEMA is going to do some research about grant funding. The commissioner from Massachusetts will be setting up another meeting.

It would be beneficial to have the annual Legislative report speak to the need of having an emergency preparedness plan in place for Vermont. Rhode Island and Massachusetts both have a plan Vermont can glean from.

Things to consider when creating an emergency preparedness plan:

* Implementing the use of the COVID-19 tool. UVM has used the tool and it has worked well.
* Making sure Telehealth has captioning available.
* Making clear masks available.
* Give audiologist and speech language pathologists the ability to bill when using telehealth to provide services.
* Be given the opportunity to use plexiglass stands between people to provide services in person.
* Make hearing aid repair an essential service.

A subgroup will stay on after this meeting to further discuss an emergency preparedness plan. Those who will attend are: Bill Hudson, Spenser Weppler, Charlea Baker and AJ Van Tassel.

**Deaf/Hard of Hearing Drive Cards**

The Department of Motor Vehicles has reached out to Spenser about creating these cards. Spenser will collect the councils input and report back to the DMV. There will also be input from the Vermont Police Association. At one point, the Deaf Vermonters Advocacy group had a card and could also offer input.

Once the details on what is needed on the card is determined, the DMV will create and distribute to the public using town offices and other venues. Laura Siegel would like to help with outreach.

Will and Spenser will work out the details on how to move forward.

**Other/Public Comment**

Will and Spenser will create a short survey to poll the council on the effectiveness of holding this meeting remotely and get the councils feedback.

The next meeting is scheduled for July 16. Please let Will or Spenser know if that date won’t work for you.

**Meeting was adjourned – 11:18**