Self-Direction Advisory Board

December 7, 2022

Board Members Attending

Nancy Alterio

Liz Fahey

Marissa Pike

Robin Foley

Ann Fracht

Jeffrey Paquette

Jeff Keilson

Michael Weiner

Leslie Kinney

Leo Sarkissian

Barbara Pandolfi

Michele Goode

Cindy Thomas

Julie Howley Westwater

Julie Flaherty

Kimberly Truong

DDS Staff

Jane Ryder

Terry O’Hare

Jennifer Benoit

Ed Wilson

Amy Nazaire

Victor Hernandez

Teryl Smith

Gail Gillespie

Laney Bruner-Canhoto

Chris Klaskin

Jaclyn Grant

Elizabeth Morse

Julia Wojeciechowski

Sarah Peterson

Joseph Weru

Guests

Val Bradley

John Agosta

Yoshi Kardell

Eric McAfee

Elise Mercer

Alexi Bernardi

Kathleen Keith

Cindy O’Connor

Lydia Sheehey

Linda Moronni

Donna Kushi

Nate Hoover

Amy Boone

Judi Goldberg (IG)

Matthew Buening (IG)

Lotte Diomede

Christina Gravina (BILT)

Deb Flaschen (3L Place)

Robin Stocklan

Cat Kaner

Dianne Huggon

Anne Baird

Ed Underwood

Nan Leonard

Robert Beckett

Materials

HSRI PowerPoints

Nancy Alterio called the meeting to order. Liz Sandblom read the roll call.

Nancy asked for motions to accept the 09.07.22 minutes.

First Motion: Kimberly Truong

Second Motion: Robin Foley

No Discussion

Leo Sarkissian abstained due to not having the chance to read through thoroughly.

Commissioner Ryder’s Report

We’re in the middle of a transition to a new administration and working to be part of a hopefully smooth transition when the new governor is sworn in on January 5th. Another issue consuming our agency is workforce issues. Residential providers, day providers, and state ops have been impacted and we are seeing staffing levels at levels we have never encountered before. Stakeholders and providers are doing everything they can to attract staff. We are seeing slight improvement, but this is an issue that is not going to be rectified in a quick manner.

We are committed to working with our providers and want to get services back to where they were before COVID, but I don’t think it will get back to what it was before COVID. We’re working on developing more options outside of traditional services. We have to move away from more staff centered services and the traditional 24/7 group home is not the future. We need to develop more residential options. We are exploring day services changing back to exploring more employment opportunities. You will be hearing more about that as we develop them. Our technology initiative is going to be a huge part of supporting people. Self-direction is going to be a huge part of supporting people too. We want to make sure everyone knows what is available and how we can meet the needs of individuals.

When I attended the National Conference the demographics of the people who tend to be attracted to self-directed serveries became clear. We had some good conversations about why this happens and how to address it. We need to work on getting more families informed about self-direction and how we can better use it to meet the needs of these families. There are many things going on in self-direction. Topics touch upon our themes of consistency, transparency, and accessibility.

We are now fully staffed with our 2 new members, Michelle Goode & Marissa Pike. We had our public hearing and Sarah Peterson will be taking about that shortly. We are going to be putting a self-direction support broker in every area office. They will be available to educate and make the program work for people. They will be a designated subject matter expert which will be a huge positive to promote consistency. Sub committee is formed and looking forward to hearing Robin’s report. HSRI report will be found to be very informative. We are going to be looking into a new standardized assessment that will stretch across the agency. It will go a long way in providing transparency and consistency with regards to how we provide services to individuals across the board. Thank you for being board members. I appreciate your help in developing this model further.

DDS Legal Update-Sarah Peterson

Good morning everyone thank you for having me here today. I’m always glad to participate and hear updates. We had our public hearing on November 21st from 1pm-4pm on WebEx. We had a full 3 hours of comments from community members and stakeholders. Highest number of attendees was 125 people. 27 people attend and provided oral comments. 31 provided written comments. It was requested that a transcript of the public hearing be generated and that is in process. We have a process that is in compliance and the next step is to review testimony and comments and then review regulations, in draft form, in relation to comments. We will then revise the draft regulations as applicable. There is no firm timeline when they must be filed, but we are looking to move through this process as expeditiously as possible and continue to work with those who provided feedback. Public comment is really important when regulations are being promulgated. We appreciate the attendance and participation.

Questions/ Comments

Leo Sarkissian: Leo Sarkissian:  The law states this is a consultative body. I would hope that time would be allocated regularly for discussion, and to receive feedback regularly about S-D from members.  We should have an impact on regulations or other policies. If open law rules make this type of dialogue complicated, maybe we could schedule private meetings. Thank you for your presentation.

Michael Weiner: The common theme is that DDS has not been as transparent. To only gave a few weeks’ notice before releasing regulations. Whether or not you have a statutory requirement is not relevant. You should have made the board aware of the regulations. This was counterproductive.

Barbara Pandolfi: How many people on the board were at the hearing? Can you give us any flavor of the comments that were made?

Sarah Peterson: We have requested transcripts for the oral testimony. What I am about to say is based more on written comments. Some comments were related to definitions that were included or not included in the regulations, the appeal period, participant responsibilities, and the budget process. Some people just shared their individual experience with self-direction as it exists currently in the department.

Nancy Alterio: There has been a lot of work done and there is still a lot of work to do. We truly appreciate the candid feedback that was provided at the public hearing. They will get the transcript and identify the trend. They will look at the regulations and modify them in response to public comments.

Jane Ryder: The regulations have not been promulgated, it is a process, and the public hearing is only the first step. There is a lot more to go as far as tweaking the regulations.

Board members-will look into

Central Office Update-Liz Sandblom

Thank you for joining the board Michelle and Marissa. Please take a few seconds to introduce yourself.

Michelle Goode: I am a former state employee, now retired. I most recently worked at MassHealth and previously worked at DMH and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. In my work at MassHealth, I worked on the waiver programs and had a lot of interaction around self-direction. I’m very encouraged and happy to participate.

Marissa Pike: I am a self-direction client in Lynn. I work as an EMT and I’m pursuing my master’s degree. I believe in advocacy, and I believe nothing changes unless you advocate for change.

Liz Sandblom: Thank you both. We have all the meeting notes and subject matter up on our website in case people want to go back and look at what we’ve been doing. On our website, I would like to post member list. It won’t have any contact information and will just be a list of the board member names. If anyone has a concern, please let me know. I’d like to welcome back PPL. They are our fiscal intermediary and provide all the behind the scenes support with PDP. It will be helpful for them to hear feedback on your experience. We have 1,142 enrolled in PDP and 824 people enrolled in Agency With Choice for a current total of 1,966 individuals. We have been seeing consistent growth month to month, between 1 and 2 percent.

HSRI Project Update-Val Bradley

I just want to echo what Jane said earlier. We should make sure self-direction is uniformly available across all social, racial, and ethnic groups. Our data clearly shows that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in self-direction.

In late 2021 DDS contracted with us to do several things. They asked us to conduct a qualitative analysis of PDP and AWC program really building on the 3-year eval we completed a few years ago. They also asked us to analyze the current way they assess budget allocation and develop a budget allocation process.

We talked to regional self-direction managers, self-direction coordinators, DDS Central Office staff, support brokers, family members, SDAB members, AWC providers, self-advocates, and Area Office staff.

Themes that emerged include: how do people learn about self-direction and how do they go about choosing self-direction; what information are they provided on self-direction and managing the self-direction program overtime; what kind of support is available to help people navigate through the self-direction process; clarify what is allowable; and budget development. Support brokers thought it was really important for DDS to prepare some easily accessible materials, making various self-direction documents on a self-direction website, develop a support broker guide, and carry out outreach to minority participants.

Recommendations

Consolidate service codes, move to an a la carte menu, create budget transparency so people who opt for self-direction understand how the budget is arrived at, building a bridge between DESE and PDP, clarify roles of support brokers, increase waiver reimbursement, support learning communities, consult with participants in order really understand their experiences, lobby for dedicated funding stream, and create menu transparency-what people can take advantage of. A lot of people noted that we need more support for people who are self-directing. It is not realistic for 1 person to be responsible. DDS is looking to create a position to assist families.

We should focus on natural supports and helping families to see where other types of accommodations and support exist for them. It has been happening in some areas but not statewide. It’s important to maximize the resources available. If the program grows by 75%, will we be able to maintain that level of support over time. Work needs to be done to resolve the uneven level of expertise among AWC navigators. It was unclear whether staff were assigned or if the person got to choose their staff. The Agency With Choice manual still has not come out.

Needs to be more of a focus on staff recruitment. With individuals who have a big family community network it is easier. Newer people or isolated people need more help identifying staff. Some requests have been to generate list of PPL staff, develop online employment packages for staff hiring, and examine precedent of paying parents. For sustainability purposes, consider issues facing aging caregivers. More people are asking these questions and how are support brokers and case manager working to plan for this?

Yoshi Kardell: Now that Val has talked about all of our recommendations, I wanted to share some things that DDS is actively working on. We knew DDS was pursuing some of the things that are in process that are in line with some of the recommendations (see PowerPoint). They are drafting guide for people in PDP. We are working on identifying an assessment tool and complete procurement process. There will be a pilot for those who participate in self-direction.

Questions/Comments

Liz Sandblom: The AWC manual will be coming out soon. We also have 3 new providers from our most recent RFR in October.

Leo Sarkissian: On reducing codes, that gets me nervous because the dilemma is how people recruit staff.

Liz Sandblom: Reducing codes is very specific and related to flexible funding. Sometimes families come to us with something, and it doesn’t fit into a child code and we get stuck. We are rolling everything up to allow for more flexibility in direct response to feedback we’ve been receiving.

Leo Sarkissian: Will this be posted so people now what the buckets are?

Liz Sandblom: Part of the participant toolbox will make this clear and available to families and individuals. They are not direct service codes just to be clear.

Leo Sarkissian: I can share with the board and HSIR some of my comments in writing since we are running short on time.

Julie Flaherty: Do you have any other suggestions how we can pose questions on identifying and implementing the assessment process. Is there a timetable for that?

Liz Sandblom: It’s a combination of HSRI and the subcommittee. There are some procurement rules that we need to be cognizant of. We would set up a meeting, separate from the regular SDAB meeting, dedicating time to discuss this with board members.

Julie Flaherty: When will this be?

Liz Sandblom: Hopefully in January.

Julie Flaherty: As far as recruitment challenges, have you thought about any networking with MassHealth and considered integrating your recruitment effort with those in other parts of state government?

Liz Sandblom: I think that’s a great suggestion. PPL is working on some things for us as well along with Rewarding Work. I would be interested in talking to you offline and brainstorming.

Julie Flaherty: It makes sense to look at the 2 of them together and see if there is a way to integrate.

Nancy Alterio: I know people who use PCA services. Those individuals are also struggling to find people. We should make a connection.

Julie Flaherty: For further exploration, to consider other overlaps with waiver funding and MassHealth.

Leo Sarkissian: If there is a way to get this meeting in January that would be wonderful.

Liz Fahey: Independent facilitators would provide equity and allow other families to be able to participate in self-direction. This would be the answer to helping more families.

Regional Updates-Self-Direction Regional Managers

Jen Benoit: We are going to be making a change to the hiring process and take advantage of the 60-day grace period for the NBC. We have weighed this out heavily over the past few months. We would hate to have a provider working who is not suitable and there are the timelines to ensure we are adhering to the 60 days. The 60-day grace period will help us get providers working faster. They will still have to go thought the credentialing paperwork, CORI, and DPPC. PPL will help us with some more detailed reports to track this closely. If they don’t pass the NBC or go past the 60 days, they are no longer able to work.

Liz Sandblom: Providers can use this and they have HR department who can track this. We had done this for a while, but we have been working with PPL on really tightening it up and we are all at a point where we are comfortable. CORI and DPPC are nonnegotiable. You have 60 days from the date of the letter before you would no longer be able to get paid.

Ed Wilson: There has been a positive trend that there has been uptick in in person presentations and fairs. We have some DDS swag that we can hand out when we attend these events. In addition to the virtual trainings, we have attended 10-15 in person trainings and fairs.

Questions/Comments

Julie Flaherty: If you have someone who is coming from another agency who has already had their NBC can we make this faster?

Ed Wilson: There is a process in place if the provider has been fingerprinted within the last 60 days. We work with PPL to get the results applied to their PDP position.

PPL Updates-Eric McAfee

We serve the AWP, DESE, and PDP program a lot of the things commissioner Ryder brought up tie into what PPL is doing to assist the department. The need for a provider directory will help with staff retention and recruitment. The first update is My Account which will be the one stop hub for all enrollment activities, timesheets submission, and budget activities. The greatest benefits are greater emphasis on self-service, the addition of a provider directory, and more visual aids. It will have all electronic signatures so no more printing out packets and we will be able to process it right away. There will be red, yellow, and green lights to indicate how far you are in the application process. Regarding budgets, participants will still have the same capabilities that they have today and will have some visuals. For the provider directory, we have a list of all active direct care workers already, so we are developing a platform for families to access it. It’s linked to MyAccount and is called PPL connect. Any new person who is looking to self-direct will be able to search for a provider based on their availability, experience, skill set, location, qualifications etc. You can privately connect via chat through website and start the conversation. Hopefully it will address caregiver burnout as well. We are hiring a community liaison who will be dedicated to in person assistance and training with Area Office staff. They will be moving from office to office answering questions. It’s important to grow that relationship and elicit feedback from DDS on improvements. We are hoping the self-advocates community would be willing to provide the community liaison with feedback on their experience and suggestions for improvements as well.

Questions/Comments

Robin: When will this be available?

Eric McAfee: In 2023. We will have a more specific date coming soon.

Nancy Alterio: When in 2023?

Eric McAfee: Probably closer to the fall of 2023.

Liz Fahey: I’m really excited about the new changes. With the provider directory, will providers be contacted to see if they wanted to be included?

Eric McAfee: Yes, of course.

Liz Fahey: Are there any incentives for providers to join the directory?

Eric McAfee: They would be able to pick up additional hours if they are only working a few hours with 1 participant.

Julie Flaherty: Will rates be included in the provider directory?

Eric McAfee: The current rates will not be included, but they can note a range of pay they would be willing to work for. Word of mouth is key to finding staff we are open to hearing ideas.

Self-Direction Moving Forward-Robin Foley

The subcommittee formed recently, and we have met twice. It is a small group, and we are having some thoughtful discussions. The subcommittee members are Liz Fahey, Jeff Keilson, Rich Santucci, Elizabeth Sandblom, Gail Gillespie, Jaclyn Grant, and me). It is a great method to get the detail really thought out. We will keep you guys updated as we move forward.

Questions/Comments

Barbara: Is the committee reaching out to any people who receive services?

Gail Gillespie: Yes. It depends on the topic, but we are looking to increase our work with self-advocates.

MASS Report

Anne Fracht: No updates. I will not be giving updates anymore at these meetings.

Public Comments

Lydia Sheehy: Are providers locked into that rate for every client?

Ed Wilson: They are not locked into 1 rate and can negotiate with families.

Diane Huggon: Are there minutes of the subcommittee meetings?

Liz Sandblom: Yes. We do have minutes.

Gail Gillespie: The minutes will need to be approved by commissioner, but this group should see them.

Leo Sarkissian: On the provider directory - are participants/surrogates also asked for their approval for staff to be listed?

Eric McAfee: Yes. Participants need to give approval as well.

Donna Kushi: Thank you for allowing public attendance. This is enormously helpful for folks who self-direct like my family.

Kathleen Keith: Is there a way to connect existing enrolled families with families who are interested in starting self-direction?

Ed Wilson: Yes. Families can connect with each other and ask their broker to connect them with other people who are self-directing their services.

Anne: We need more self-advocates need to be included.

Lotte Diomede: With self-direction we were excited, but it has crashed and burned. It revolves around staffing and no money for programming.

Jane Ryder: We are trying to bring more families and participants into it. It is a case-by-case basis.

Lotte Diomede: So, he may not even qualify for self-direction if what you’re saying is true. I would be interested in having a voice in this. How do people get signed up for pilots?

Jane Ryder: You can reach out to me if you’re interested in participating and we can discuss further.

Diane Huggon: Was the SDAB involved in reviewing the AWC Manual?

Robin Foley: Yes. Gail and I were involved.

Nancy asked for motions to adjourn.

First motion: Robin Foley

Second motion: Anne Fracht

Nancy thanked the committee and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting: March 1, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Jaclyn Grant