Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Virtual - via zoom

January 10, 2023

11:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.

**Remote Participation**

Toni Wolf (Co-Chair), Sacha Stadhard (Co-Chair), Dianne Lescinskas, Carolyn Kain, Nancy Parker, Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Pam Ferguson, Ellen Taverna, Michael Stepansky, Ilyse Levine, Janine Solomon, Carol Gracia, and AJ Cullen

Guests: Ian Moura and Joanne Nicholson (Brandeis University) – Andrew Mackenzie, Amy Poulin, Amy Krukonis and Vani Rastigu-Kelly (DESE)

**Welcome and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Wolf welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and reviewed the agenda. Members of the subcommittee introduced themselves via zoom and the minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. Ms. Levine made a motion to approve the minutes and Ms. Kain seconded the motion. Hearing no discussion or opposition, the meeting minutes were approved.

Commissioner Wolf introduced Joanne Nicholson and Ian Moura from Brandeis University. They will be presenting today on “Using Autistic Adults’ Perspectives to Improve Supports for Employment Success”. Ian Moura is a Doctoral student at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management.

**Presentation**

Ian is an autistic adult and currently a social policy PhD student with an interest in employment that developed from first-hand experience. He felt like research and media representations were not capturing reality for a lot of autistic people and wanted to figure out how to facilitate better outcomes.

* Funded by a grant from SSA and will have the opportunity to present findings to the SSA at the conclusion of the project
* Purpose is to collect data on autistic adult experience on finding, obtaining, and keeping employment – investigate autistic adults’ perceptions of challenges/barriers to employment and understand what helps autistic adults feel satisfied and successful in employment
* A survey was created based on literature, interviews and discussion with autistics, service providers, family, and other supporters
* Most of the respondents had a professional diagnosis, 44% diagnose at age 21 or older, 28% diagnosed before age 21
* 92% had at least one condition or disability that commonly co-occurs with autism
* 93% of respondents had had at least one paid job, 53% had gone 6 months or more without employment and 60% of those are not currently employed, 33% had either never held a job or a year or more or only had one job which they held for a year or more
* Disclosure – 37 % never disclose their autism when they are applying for a job and 22% think disclosing that they are autistic makes it harder to get a job
* Some things that create challenges – unspoken social expectations, anxiety and depression, difficulty understanding indirect requests or communication, sensory issues due to the physical environment and feeling misunderstood
* There is a misalignment with what autistic adults want and what services are being provided
* Respondents who identify as POC, bi-or multi-racial indicated that racial prejudice was a barrier to employment

***Key takeaways***

* Job match matters – interests, skills, values etc.
* Need for employer training
* Autistic people are complicated, just like all people – lots of variety in needs, experiences, and preferences
* Policy makers should consider the whole person – including co-occurring conditions – establish partnerships with other services – ensure employers have the support they need to be supportive, be thoughtful on how outcomes are defined

***Discussion***

* MRC needs to do more on co-occurring diagnosis and opportunities for informal feedback (communicate to people why they are important)
* AANE is doing a training with MRC
* This information will be shared with the adult subcommittee
* Want to make sure that individuals can speak for themselves on what they need and share their experiences

**Presentation by DESE and the work being done on DEI**

This subcommittee had invited DESE to share information on data and information they have on DEI work that is being done by the department.

* The presenters are from the Office of Public Monitoring but there are many other offices working on DEI
* Data is infused and grounded in the vision and mission of the work
* Placements of students are from IEP discussions and data is looking at LRE
* Data does show that black students are placed in substantially separate classrooms at a much higher rate than others
* When they have that data – DESE will enter conversations with the particular district
* How to move forward with the data? Sometimes districts are aware of the discrepancies - they put in specific training and will want to see the numbers trending in a more positive way for students
* MRC had looked at DESE data over a year ago, in two urban districts and had similar findings
* DESE will lead with data, listen to the districts, and move towards change
* DESE does not have demographics for the teachers/educators for this set of data
* DESE is doing PD on intersection of race and special education with a focus on trying to understand the racial inequities across the state

There was not enough time to finish this presentation so DESE has agreed to join the subcommittee at their next meeting.

With no further business to discuss there was a motion to end the meeting by Ms. Stadhard and the motion was moved by Ms. Kain.