Autism Commission

Housing Sub-Committee meeting Minutes

August 8, 2018, 11:00am–1:00pm

500 Harrison Avenue – Boston, MA

Members present: Dan Burke (chair), Ayana Gonzalez (chair), Carolyn Kain, Nan Leonard, Dianne Lescinskas, Victor Hernandez, Cathy Boyle, Michele Brait, Judith Ursitti, representative for Rep. Christine Barber and Lea Hill

Members accessing the meeting remotely: Leo Sarkissian, Janet George and Karen Mariscal

Dan Burke, the Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed the members to the meeting of this Sub-Committee. Mr. Burke stated that the meeting was subject to the Open Meeting Law and that the Sub-Committee members present would need to vote to approve the remote participation of some members because of their geographic location, whenever any members were utilizing video and/or tele-conferencing. Remote access was approved unanimously. The minutes from the last meeting in April were reviewed and with one minor change on page 2 of the minutes, they were approved unanimously.

**Announcements**

Ayana Gonzalez, co-chair of the Housing Subcommittee, announced that she will be leaving DHCD in the next few weeks. She has taken a position at TAC and will consult with other states on supportive housing. A representative from DHCD will work with this subcommittee until Ms. Gonzalez’s position is filled.

**MassHousing Update**

Ms. Kain, Ms. Ursitti, Ms. Boyle and Ms. Hill did an ASD training for MassHousing property managers in June. The training covered different topics that included: Autism 101, how individuals can connect with state agencies, DDS services, and housing accommodations /strategies on how to work with ASD individuals. There were approximately 40-50 attendees at the training and it was received well. MassHousing asked if this group could do this training in the fall for their property managers.

**Discussion of Ideas and Goals for Committee**

1. ***Develop a set of Autism Housing Guidelines***

* This is a process and we will need to engage architects, developers and families
* DDS and DHCD will need to approve the design guidelines
* There was discussion on current design guidelines, one member commented that she does not believe that they are not ADA compliant because they do not accommodate individuals with ASD
* We want to be sure we are not limiting the design guidelines to just rental apartments but to also look at group homes - “supportive affordable housing” – the language in the recommendation could say *state funded housing*
* The design guidelines should be universally designed for everyone
* Rolland Design Guidelines were discussed – they were more around the safety and evacuation plans for housing
* Karen Mariscal discussed that many individuals will not need specialized housing and we need to be careful not to paint a picture that all ASD individuals will need this type of housing
* The design guidelines could ensure a basic design for most with ASD and then add on to the guidelines to assist those who have more needs
* It was noted that there could be language to address a level 1, 2 or 3 – a clear way to address the need
* The language could say “accessible to the full range of people with ASD”
* They may not be new design guidelines but additional language to the guidelines and should also include the needs of children, not just adults.

The subcommittee members were all in agreement to move this recommendation forward. Ms. Kain, Ms. Leonard and Ms. Boyle will work on the language for the recommendation and Ms. Gonzalez will assist them in developing the recommendation.

1. ***Initiate a Statewide Outreach and Engagement Mechanism for Homeless Adults with ASD***

* The DMH PATH program was discussed. They go to homeless shelters and assess individuals for mental health issues. Ms. Kain reported that she has had discussions with individuals from DMH and they do not have the capacity to take on the assessment of ASD individuals. DMH has received additional funding and it might be worthwhile to revisit the PATH Program. Ms. Kain will reach out to DMH and discuss doing training for their workers.
* Ms. Hill discussed that she and her staff met with the Northeast Region PATH team and they were welcoming of the information and she gave them the Adult ASD Resource Guide.
* Ms. Kain and Ms. Lescinskas had visited Pine Street Inn and met with their Executive Director to discuss training for the workers to help identify ASD and connect with resources. The ED has since left Pine Street Inn and they will follow up in September with the new ED.
* Ms. Boyle discussed a study that was done in the UK and the findings discussed ASD individuals are more likely to become homeless and living in shelters.
* Ms. Gonzalez said it might be a good idea to do training for Continuum of Care Programs (COC) and also the Inter-agency of Housing and Homeless (many agencies attend these meetings). It is a good opportunity to get the message out and move the conversation on ASD and homelessness.
* This is a resource issue and it could be worked on with coordination and collaboration of multiple agencies. PATH is an existing resource it would make sense to try and expand the work to include training for ASD.
* Mr. Sarkissian discussed the Olmstead Draft Plan and that there is a lot of focus on homelessness – this subcommittee should review the draft plan and see what they are doing.
* Ms. Boyle discussed tacking on a data collection plan and that there is a homeless census – could we add on a question about ASD – HUD does a homeless count each year with a survey - this could be a way to collect some data – think about the strategy once you ask the question and collect data.
* Local police also know the homeless population – it is another resource or training opportunity.
* The goal is to train existing shelter workers to better recognize ASD individuals and connect them with resources
* It was suggested to pilot a training in 2-3 shelters across the state
* Short Term Goal – Outreach and data – we don’t know the size of the problem – the numbers to back up any resource request will help with funding

The issue will move forward as a goal. Mr. Sarkissian, Ms. Kain and Ms. Boyle will work on the language and Mr. Hernandez and Ms. Gonzalez will be available for advice/consultation.

1. ***Housing 101***

* Develop a clearing house of trainings so people can access information related to housing – people do not know where to go to get information
* Develop two (2) types of presentations: 1. For housing providers and 2. For Families
* Ms. Boyle has been working with families for over 8 years and has trainings and webinars on her website
* Autism Housing Pathways received a $5,000 grant from Autism Speaks for ASD adults with no family involvement to assist them with housing applications
* The MassHousing training could be replicated – how can we disperse this information – create a library of resources that lives in one place
* This is a broader issue than just housing – guidance for families on understanding the system is important – there are state resources that provide support
* Mass. Families Organizing for Change has a housing and service presentation
* How can we guide families to the available resources

This subcommittee discussed passing this goal off to either the Transition/Employment or Adult Subcommittee. Ms. Boyle will share the link from her website to the webinar/training. This subcommittee agreed to table this discussion until their meeting in October.

1. ***Pilot Projects – develop 3-4 pilot projects to move forward with the utilization of several different housing models for people on the spectrum over the next 2-3 years.***

* Ways to increase individual supports that will allow an individual to live more independently
* Test out different potential models or increase the supply – it’s both
* Look at model group homes that have been successful at preventing individuals from being hospitalized
* The individuals in these group homes are very different – some are older with dementia and are living with younger autistic individuals – it is like running two different programs
* How can these homes plan for unpredictable behaviors?
* Many end up leaving their group home and hospitalized due to behaviors but may not go back to their original group home once stabilized
* The design and structure of the group homes need to look different – how can providers best support individuals to allow them to stay when behaviors arise
* Better staff training and staff ratio – this is not a housing question but a support question
* Two different goals **1*.)*** *Increase the capacity of the DDS provider community to meet the intensive needs of ASD individuals* ***2.)*** *Models that currently exist are not appropriate for this population*
* Look at specific case studies of individuals at places like Hogan Institution and work it backwards – what can be done as a preventative measure – look at settings that are successful and use their best practices
* This goes back to design guidelines and the guidelines could help with behaviors – it is also about staffing and support
* These are not pilot projects but are more of a **case study** of existing projects – compare and contrast – training and environmental modifications could help to enhance livability
* This case study could be an internal task for DDS – there are privacy issues
* Olmstead Plan question – who has DDS not been able to keep in their community and why?
* DMH tends to structure their housing to decrease interactions with others/group living
* This subcommittee should look at the reasons why individuals are not successful in community housing and address those issues – look at what is working and what is not working
* There is already data on ED boarding and there is a system tracking for these individuals

This subcommittee will look at this goal of developing housing models for individuals that have been previously unsuccessful in a group home. They will look at the licensing guidelines of a group home and will continue to explore this issue.

The next meeting for this subcommittee is scheduled for October 17th at 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

With no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned.