Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Virtual Webex Meeting

August 28, 2020

2:00 p.m.– 3:45 p.m.

**Remote Participation**

Toni Wolf (Co-Chair), Sacha Stadhard (Co-Chair), Dianne Lescinskas, Carolyn Kain, Terri Farrell, Amanda Green, Jacob Rotman, Maura Sullivan, Gyasi Burkes-Abbott, Pamela Furgerson and Kathleen Stern

Commissioner Wolf stated that the meeting was subject to the Open Meeting Law and that the Subcommittee members present would need to vote to approve the remote participation members because of their geographic location, whenever any members were utilizing video and/or teleconferencing. Remote access was approved unanimously.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the 14-22/Employment meeting on March 10, 2020 were reviewed and were approved unanimously.

**Welcome and Managing Remote Meeting**

Commissioner Wolf welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and each member introduced themselves on WebEx. The features of WebEx were reviewed.

**Check In**

Ms. Stadhard gave members an opportunity to discuss challenges/issues in this new environment and asked what they have been hearing from families.

* Turning 22 individuals not having access to transition services as they move into adult services
* Most families are confused about services and what is available
* Private programs struggling with finding and affording PPE
* Individuals feeling isolated – regression in behavior and skills
* Many families have fears on in-person learning
* Transportation fears
* Rapid testing in school/programs
* Access to technology for some – connection may not work in certain areas or in a home with multiple people trying to gain access at once
* A portion of ASD individuals are not able to access remote learning due to their disability
* Educators are also struggling in this environment due to the lack of community based services - the Transition Specialist are typically out in the community and not in classrooms – not enough space in some schools for their students. They would appreciate partnering with families who may have ideas or solutions.
* Chat Box – Nov. 9th the NDD is hosting a virtual transition conference with a focus on ASD and transition to the adult health care system
* MRC is concerned about the T22 population and the low rate of referrals

**MRC Remote Status**

Commissioner Wolf discussed the remote status of MRC and the new online application.

* Staff will continue to work remotely throughout the calendar year
* Referrals to MRC programs have dropped by 44%
* Inquiries to MRC have dropped by 45%
* Unemployment rate for persons with disability (16+) – 2019: 7.3% 2020: 14.3%
* The consumer technology initiative has provided consumers with MiFi, hotspots, computer monitors, internet access etc
* MRC is testing an online application from Sept 8 – Oct. 31 - this will provide one additional avenue for consumers to be referred to MRC – consumers will still be able to access an application by phone or walk -in – MRC is hoping providers will help consumers with the application
* MRC conducted a Consumer Remote Access Survey as part of the Massachusetts COVID-19 State of Emergency response efforts – the survey was to collect feedback from consumers with current, active cases to assess their satisfaction related to MRC is presently meeting their needs as it relates to service delivery. Overall, 85% of all survey respondents were satisfied with MRC services. Many consumers prefer a mix of in person and video meetings with MRC staff, some do not enjoy the video chat and others only want video chat (zoom, WebEx) There was a digital divide on how consumers would like their remote services. The MRC phone line is a barrier and they are looking to change the system
* MRC was able to order 2200 computers for consumers and will be offering computer training in group settings and will provide more of an individual approach when someone gets stuck – they are also considering adding an IT hotline
* Bigger issues – individuals getting lost from school to transition to adult services and lack of employment opportunities
* Some individuals with IDD have difficulty with accessing technology – remote access is a barrier for them – we need to think of ways to better serve these individuals. MRC is reaching out to providers for feedback on their online application and will adjust accordingly based off the feedback provided

**DOL Remote Status**

Ms. Stadhard discussed the changes in the Career Center landscape and what has been accomplished in these times.

* MassHire Centers closed to foot traffic but remains opened virtually through phone, email and video conferencing
* MassHire has reassigned staff to their sister agency, DUA to support with the claim taking process, and routing claimants for assistance
* They have found that there are many IT issues for users – logging into accounts and forgetting passwords - will consult with MRC and looking at best practices to help with this issue
* Staff training on how to deliver virtual services and identify tools, resources, workshops that need to be offered in order to move youth, jobseekers and business through service flows in order to get their needs met
* They have created a systematic response to the changing workforce conditions – Road to Reemployment (R2R)
* There is work being done to increase availability and delivery of virtual workforce services (e.g. career exploration, virtual job fairs skill development, etc) and make sure they effectively use technology and tools to make services more accessible.
* Moving forward there will be a new way of doing business and they will continue to use the virtual option – this will help consumers with travel difficulties and save time
* They recognize that some individuals need in-person services and they are thinking about how to provide that support

**Educational Guidelines and Questions**

Ms. Green, from DESE reviewed the guidelines and the (COVID 19) Special Education Technical Assistance Advisory and discussed areas that are relevant to students with ASD.

* All information can found on the DESE Special Education Home Page and there is a COVID 19 general resource page with additional information
* The COVID 19 Special Education Technical Assistance Advisory includes information on compensatory services
* Information is relevant to ASD but really is for all students with disabilities
* Students with an IEP are still entitled to FAPE – FAPE will look different under COVID 19 pandemic and families and districts need to work together
* Supports include General Education Recovery Services, COVID 19 Compensatory Services and New IEP Services
* The Department recommends prioritizing students identified as “high needs” (complex and significant needs), Preschool aged children and students who turned 22 during the suspension of in-person learning or who will turn 22 during the first three months of the 2020-21 school year – districts are asked to make these decisions no later than December 2020
* The IEP Team will make determinations based on data and information which should include gathering information from parents and caregivers – the advisory also mentions data from Pre ETS providers
* The document makes it clear that it is not a requirement to have an IEP meeting and that discussions can be had outside of an IEP meeting
* Under App. B – Turning 22 – it might be important to have an IEP meeting even if the student has already turned 22
* Schools have been encouraged to collaborate with adult agencies
* DESE will continue compliance and families have access to the Problem Resolution System

**Direction For Next Meeting**

Subcommittee members discussed identifying one or two items to recommend and use the group members in a proactive manner.

* Equity and access is one area to consider as we move forward with this work – goal or objective – this is something that has been discussed in the past and is included in all of the recommendations that have been put forth by this subcommittee and will continue to be included
* Focus should be on reestablishing what services students were receiving pre-COVID – different districts are using different approaches right now – look at reestablishing resources
* Invite CAST to a meeting since they are experts on ADL
* DESE has issued guidance - how can we inform the broader community about the current guidance
* Look at services being offered by all agencies, not just DESE (special education) – how can we as a group encourage in-person ABA

**Next Meeting**

A small subgroup will meet virtually in September and put together a work plan to discuss and identify:

1. What are the barriers (currently) specific to ASD
2. Realistic approach on which barriers can be overcome and which are more long-term

Subgroup members will include, Carolyn Kain, Toni Wolf, Judith Ursitti, Sacha Stadhard, Dianne Lescinskas and possibly Jeanine Soloman. A doodle poll will be emailed to the subgroup members to secure a date for a meeting in September.

This subcommittee will continue to meet every other month and an additional doodle poll will be emailed to members to secure a meeting date for October and December.

Ms. Kain will reach out to DDS and MassHealth to assess their current situation regards to services being provided during the pandemic.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.