Massachusetts Autism Commission

Adult Subcommittee

March 30, 2021

Via WebEx

**Participants**

Carolyn Kain, Christine Hubbard, Kathy Sanders, Cynthia Berkowitz, Lea Hill, Dianne Lescinskas, Maria Stefano, Nancy Marticio, Joshua Greenberg, Dania Jekel and Kathy Stern

**Approval of Meeting Minutes from January 27, 2021**

The meeting minutes from January 27, 2021 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

**Discussion of technological innovations to serve autistic adults receiving MassHealth and DDS services**

The discussion is a follow up on the request of CMS to approve an amendment to adult waivers to approve technology/remote work. Ways to use technology for services more effectively/efficiently to meet people’s needs. These are ongoing discussions and this subcommittee will wait for an update from Janet George at the next meeting.

* Other Autism Commission subcommittees are also discussing technology use during the pandemic
* Ms. Kain is not involved in the CMS discussions thus far but agrees that technology use is beneficial and makes sense to continue this work
* Bridgewell recreational programs were made available remotely – moving forward they are looking to add and enhance remote services
* Bridgewell also reported in the beginning of pandemic lack of devices to access remote services was a barrier but they worked through issues. They started on zoom but moved to google reclassroom and staff would help families log on. Tech support is needed for some once they have logged in
* On-going need for technical support
* AANE is fully remote right now and extremely successful – there are still people who prefer in-person and feel isolated. The question is how to become both remote and offer in-person services – there is a need to expand but not sure how to do it
* AANE had to put a cap on the number of individuals for their remote support groups to be able to give individuals a chance to talk in a support group
* Ms. Hubbard discussed the meeting from September and the issues on remote access that was discussed at that meeting – some areas in MA did not have reliable internet/wifi which made remote services difficult
* Some current issues happening is adults not going out – isolation – youth have new behaviors, some violent at home and parents are afraid of their children – these issues are compounded by the isolation caused by the pandemic and not enough services (AANE reported)
* MCPAP seeing an increase in volume – increased aggression, anxiety – especially in teens
* Much of this is being caused by the loss of predictability and the loss of cohort of peers – seeing more young adults/teens in ED due to aggressive behavior and parents refusing to take home. This is causing a burden on hospitals as they need the beds for COVID patients
* Acute care is not equipped for behavior management
* Ms. Kain talked about the MHAP – Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids [Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids | Health Law Advocates](https://www.healthlawadvocates.org/initiatives/mhapforkids) – a resource that connects families with attorneys as it relates to special education, help with coordination of mental health services, collaborate with DCF, DDS and DMH. This is of no cost to the family and should help the family with a resolution with the school district.
* Ms. Hill discussed the work being done in the Northeast – they continue to do remote events and are exploring setting up a meet and greet for individuals – they can choose to meet online or meet up in person – they are waiting to see what the response will be for this initiative

**Coaching RFR and Pilot Program**

Ms. Hill discussed the pilot program that helped to inform work/designing services for individuals who were self-isolating. The information gained from the work led to pre-coaching in the RFR. More data will be available after July 1st.

* LifeWorks is now working with the entire region
* Technology has been helpful – folks who would not do in-person are now using the technology to connect
* Looking at the level of technology competency from providers
* Ms. Jekel discussed individuals using the coaching service who could not previously tolerate the one hour in-person appointment and only wanted 10 minutes – now they can do shorter “calls” or use text messaging multiple times per day allowing for more flexibility in coaching service

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the subcommittee is scheduled for May 19th, 2021. It was asked if at the next meeting there could be a discussion on the justice system. Ms. Kain commented that Department of Correction is outside of our secretariat and not part of the Autism Commission. She asked for more details on this topic so we would be able to invite folks who have more knowledge.

* Advocates runs a counseling service in Worcester and works with a jail diversion program – they could be a good resource.
* Ms. Hubbard discussed reflecting on the issues/work that has come out of the pandemic.

With no further comments or discussion, the meeting was adjourned.