June 8, 2015

Minutes

Present: Debbie Dionne, Kim Humphrey, Inga Sullivan, David Cowing, Romy Spitz, David Projansky, Mary Lou Dyer, Mary Chris Semrow, Laurie Raymond, Jenn Fales, Brian McKnight, Arthur Clum, Jaimie Hoar, Jennifer Putnam, Ed Doggett, Suellen Doggett, Katrina Ringrose, Rachel Posner, Kathy Adams, Dina Martinez, Bridget McCabe, Glenda Wilson, Sally Mileson, Julie Brennan, Jerry Silbert, Patrick Moore, Maura McDermott, Tyler Ingalls, J. Richardson Collins, Betsy Hopkins, Cullen Ryan, Vickey Rand. Via VSee – Bangor: Andrew Cassidy. Auburn: Ann Bentley. Biddeford: Todd Goodwin.

Cullen Ryan introduced himself and welcomed the group. Participants introduced themselves. A motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes from last month’s meeting. Minutes were accepted.

**Cullen:** CHOM ([Community Housing of Maine](http://www.chomhousing.org)) will be moving offices by the end of the summer. We hope to be able to host meetings of the Coalition within a couple of blocks from our current location. We will likely only be having one or two more meetings at this location.

**Featured speaker: Betsy Hopkins, Director, Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).** [**www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr**](http://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/)**. Topic: Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) update and possibilities for Maine.**

**Cullen:** VR helps individuals engage in a full, rich life through employment. Personally, when I think of this topic I think of my son. He is starting to develop transferable skills. Volunteering or employment helps in terms of connecting with peers and others in the community. Employment is how I have come to know many of the people in my life and I am hoping the same will be true for my son. This Coalition has discussed services a lot recently. Other areas of focus include housing and employment. Betsy is here today to provide an overview of the newly reenacted WIOA and how it relates to Maine and VR.

**Betsy Hopkins:** VR works with individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities around employment. VR is mostly federally funded, but also includes partial state funding. One of the things that has occurred over the past year is the re-enactment of [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/) (WIOA). I am going to go through the presentation and I am happy to answer questions afterwards. **Begin presentation.** [Click here to view the presentation.](http://www.maineparentcoalition.org/june-2015-presentation.html)

**Discussion:** There is a lot of good work going on around the state. There are a lot of great partnerships, but there is a lot that also needs to improve. This law should help with that, and it will assist with consistency and eliminating silos.

It was stated that with WIOA it might be a good time to revisit the regional councils on transition. SMACT ([Southern Maine Advisory Council on Transition](http://blogs.portlandschools.org/smact/)) has remained active and it has been beneficial. Betsy stated this is something to consider. They have been taking a close look at how they have been providing services overall in Maine. WIOA doesn’t provide any extra funding. They are shifting resources and evaluating how they’re doing work to be as efficient and effective as possible. Adding 14 to 16 year olds will add approximately an additional 2,000 people, on top of the approximate 9,000 they are already serving.

It was asked whether VR in schools is individual or in a group setting, and how early it starts. With the WIOA it starts at age 14, but they are still trying to figure out how it will play out in schools. If all of a sudden 14 year olds entered the VR program it would be very difficult. They are hoping to have a plan in place by September. It was stated that schools, day programs, and the VR all appear to be disjointed. Betsy noted that Libby Stone Sterling, Assistant Director of VR, has presented to this group previously. She is an expert on transition and is heavily involved in training for MADSEC ([Maine Administration of Services for Children with Disabilities](http://www.madsec.org/)) and involved in their work. Work is occurring now so everyone is ready for the fall. Trainings are occurring all over the state with VR counselors. VR is working closely with DHHS as well. Lisa Sturtevant has also previously presented to this group. She is working closely with VR to ensure that programs are working well.

There was discussion regarding engaging kids so that they don’t become disengaged once they graduate. The group discussed summer employment opportunities. Betsy replied that some summer work will be done within the existing VR structure, and they are beginning discussions with other agencies to increase that. They are hoping to amplify that for next summer.

There was a discussion about whether the Department of Labor (DOL) or the Department of Education (DOE) have any opportunities for technical assistance (TA) with these changes. In Maine VR is within [Maine DOL](http://www.maine.gov/labor/), however on the federal level VR is under the [US DOE](http://www.ed.gov/). There have been some grant opportunities to provide TA to states, some of which have just been awarded within the past couple of months. Staff have been attending conferences and having conversations with states that already have functional models. For example, the Progressive Employment model has been extremely successful in Vermont.

There was a discussion about job development along with skilled job coaching and how they are both essential to having successful relationships with employers. There are some great things happening with capacity building within the provider community right now. There are some excellent providers in the state, which is wonderful.

It was asked whether WIOA authorizes VR to draw down funds to pay for staff job support. VR already has job coaches on site, WIOA does not provide additional funds for this. The VR program is still considered a time-limited program, so VR is trying to dovetail and work more closely with the waiver services being provided for a long-term plan. The group discussed the independent living program, now run by [Alpha One](http://www.alphaonenow.com/index.php), which allows for one-time expenses to increase community interaction.

There was discussion regarding the performance standards included in WIOA. Betsy mentioned that there is going to be a national standard. Meetings are occurring now within the state regarding state standards. VR exits will be monitored and tracked.

The group discussed the need to define what it means to be “successfully employed.” Some individuals have gone through the program and attained a job for only one hour per week. Should this be considered successfully employed? It was stated that one hour each week isn’t enough experience to make those connections and be able to grow within that job or career. This could be a good experience to build upon, but it should not be the end-all. Betsy commented that the law does not define what successful employment looks like, though some states have individually defined this. Maine hasn’t defined successful employment yet; this may be something to think about for future legislation.

There was discussion regarding a lack of evidence-based reading programs in schools, insufficient reading instruction, and reading levels and their correlation to employability. Betsy stated that employability doesn’t necessarily tie into certain reading levels. There are a lot of examples of individuals who do not read at all who are successfully employed. This is not to say that you shouldn’t fight as much as you can to get all the education your child needs, but employment opportunities should involve exploration of skills, interests, and abilities versus what the person cannot do. Regarding work readiness, individuals need to be met where they are, but the expectations should remain high. Thinking about schools and the work around employment, the expectations often aren’t high enough. Expectations of person with ID/DD can include educational benchmarks. It was suggested that it might be beneficial for individuals with ID/DD to have the opportunity to virtually preview employment environments. Individuals would have an understanding of what the working environment looks like before they’re there. The group thought this was a wonderful idea, and many stated that promotional videos similar in nature may already be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/).

The group discussed the need for VR to thoroughly understand a person’s diagnosis, what barriers might look like, and how the disability might manifest itself on a certain job site. There are online resources including modules to support professional training that could really help someone in VR in understanding behaviors, how to interpret them, and how to react. Employers and staff on site should also have this information.

**Cullen:** Throughout this discussion many have mentioned people who have presented to this group. A subcommittee of this group, which included VR, created a Blueprint for Effective Transition. There is a lot in the WIOA that dovetails with our work: Having different parts of state government working together instead of being siloed, having strength-based assessments, consistency, and having expectations that individuals will be able to achieve their optimum capabilities coming out of the system. It is very exciting to hear how closely our work and vision overlaps with the WIOA.

**Continued discussion:** It was stated that LD 1061, which would establish a committee to study transition, has passed both the House and Senate. The hope and expectation is that the Blueprint for Effective Transition will help with their work.

It was stated that there are tools in place that are not currently used well. Graduating seniors are supposed to have a summary of performance, that ideally they participate in creating, which is a great tool for parents/guardians as well as for self-advocacy. This can be used as a tool, along with a resume of school-based work experience, to communicate with employers and VR. The more kids are exposed to, and get to look at, different jobs the better opportunities they’ll have when they leave school. There was discussion about using extended school year opportunities as work-related opportunities. Betsy stated that they have employers who are asking for workers as they are having trouble filling their needs. WIOA is trying to expand vocational training, as it has gone a little by the wayside. This should be geared toward opportunities in Maine – this is what the employer needs and WIOA addresses this. Some of the work doesn’t require high technical skills. Some of the unmet needs for employers include service industry jobs, manufacturing, industrial jobs, and jobs in the health service industry.

There was discussion regarding employment, Social Security, and caps that limit how much people can make before their benefits are in jeopardy. It was stated that a Benefit Specialist should have this information and should be a good resource. It was also suggested to check-in with the Social Security representative for additional assistance. [The Social Security Red Book](http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/definedisability.htm) was mentioned as a great resource for more information on this as well.

The group discussed the availability of tax credits as incentives to get employers involved. The tax credit is still in place; however employers are generally not interested in pursuing it, though VR provides this information to employers.

**Betsy:** I would love to return and discuss the Progressive Employment model, currently being piloted, with this group down the road.

**Cullen:** We will certainly take you up on your offer to present on the Progressive Employment model sometime in the late fall! Things are moving in the right direction, which is great. Thank you, this has been fantastic and really inspiring!

**End of presentation.** *(Round of applause)*

**DHHS Update:**

**Brian McKnight (OADS, DHHS -** [**www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads**](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads)**):**

**Waitlist Numbers:** As of May 2015, the number of people on the wait lists are: Section 21 – 1132, Priority 1 – 0 (all have pending offers, there are no individuals waiting to be offered services), Priority 2 – 412, Priority 3 – 720. Section 29 – 0 (all have pending offers, there are no individuals waiting to be offered services), people on both lists – 281. Of the 1132 people waiting for Section 21 but already receiving Section 29 – 693. The Department continues to make offers and will still make offers to everyone who is on the Section 29 waitlist as of 6/30/2015.

**Jenn Fales (OADS DHHS):** I am here to provide an SIS ([Supporting Individual Success](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/disability/ds/sis/index.shtml)) update. CMS ([Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](http://www.cms.gov/)) has asked us to put in a 90 day extension, which will push the SIS implementation date from 7/1/15 to 10/1/15. This means that instead of the January folks being the first ones to transition in, it will be the April folks. We received the RAI (Request for Additional Information) from CMS late last week; it is not as large as we expected but there are still questions to answer. We are continuing to work on the Section 21 rules, and we are starting to look at the Section 29 waiver renewal application. Bridget Bagley, who was the Waiver Manager, moved to another State position and is no longer at OADS. OADS is interviewing for her replacement next week. We hope to have an updated operational spreadsheet up on the [OADS website](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/). The case worker calculator was previewed at the case manager and family sessions last month, and will be available on the website in the near future. The June Newsletter is almost ready to go out. The Final version of the OADS Biennial Plan will also be posted very soon. In regards to the SIS (Supports Intensity Scale) forms and protocols, we are looking into asking AAIDD ([American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](http://aaidd.org/)) about combining the forms into one more user friendly form – with more information, details, and just generally more user friendly. SIS assessors have been instructed to bring blank forms and assessments so people can follow along. These are changes we’ve made based on conversations and feedback we’ve received.

**Discussion:** It was suggested that copies of the SIS be made available to parents/guardians before the actual interview. It can be very overwhelming for the individual to be discussed in an objective way. Jenn stated that she has copies of the SIS and that it is available on the [AAIDD website](http://aaidd.org/sis#.VXcv5M9VhBc). Case managers were made aware of this at the May meetings. Jenn stated that she will get copies to Cullen for distribution to this group. People are not allowed to bring in pre-scored or pre-done SIS reports to the SIS interview, but they can definitely have access to the forms and questions beforehand. It is helpful for the team to see the question so staff and people around the table can be ready to provide examples.

Jenn stated that they have approved quite a few re-assessments, for people with major life changes, people who were not well-informed, or because parents/guardians were not present for the SIS. Roberta Leonard, the scheduler at [Goold Health Systems](http://www.ghsinc.com/), have given her notice; there may be some bumps for a few weeks while Goold hires a new scheduler. Jenn added that they are hiring help for their own SIS team; a coordinator is being hired in the next couple of weeks. They are adding to the ERC (Extraordinary Review Committee) team as well.

Cullen inquired about how fast the ERC completes its work and what happens if someone breaks his or her leg and now needs more support. Jenn stated that for an assessment to be re-done there needs to be a major decline in health, a change in living situation, or something that’s going to last for 6 months or longer. For a broken leg the case manager can ask for crisis hours which are additional staff hours that happen almost immediately.

There was discussion regarding the number of offers for Section 21 that have gone out with the Department still waiting to receive responses. Two people are currently filling in for Bridget until the position is filled so this is not slowing down the process. There are a significant number of offers out there that they haven’t heard a response from. Jenn and Brian both stated they are unsure why this is the case. The Department sends notification through the mail and via telephone. They have not had any letters marked return-to-sender, which usually happens if someone has moved. Case managers can check the IES. DHHS’ legal department, as well as the Attorney General’s office, have advised that the letters must be sent directly to members or their guardians. The group inquired about the potential for a release of information so that case managers can be looped in to this process. Jenn stated that this is something they can look into.

**Cullen:** Jenn, thank you for stopping by this was wonderful! Please continue to join us. Brian, thank you as well!

Cullen announced that there is a special meeting for parents/guardians in Brunswick on June 18th with Gary Wolcott, Director, and Karen Mason, Associate Director of DHHS OADS at 6pm at the Knights of Columbus (located at 2 Columbus Drive, Brunswick). Cullen encouraged parents, guardians, and family members to attend this informative discussion. Gary and Karen will be responding to a number of questions regarding the switch to the SIS system, especially now with the delay in implementation. If parents/guardians have comments, questions, or concerns they will have the opportunity to hear directly from Gary and Karen. This will be different from previous parent meetings, which largely involved presentations, as it will solely be a question and answer session. A critical part of the process is that Gary and Karen keep inviting comments and this is a great opportunity for parents to have their voices heard.

**Legislative Updates:**

**Mary Lou Dyer (Maine Association for Community Service Providers** [**meacsp.com**](http://meacsp.com/)**):** For the first time in 20 years there is a divided report out of Appropriations regarding the biennial budget. The good news is that the cuts to kids’ programs, Sections 28 and 65, were moved out of the budget by a 12-1 vote. We are hopeful that the other proposed behavioral health cuts will not go through. Unfortunately the waitlist money was reduced to $5M from the general fund. Based on the way DHHS has to budget, this will allow 150 to 160 people to come off of the Section 21 waitlist. The final vote in the Senate had a two-thirds majority, but it will likely not hold in the House. Both caucuses were very firm about not cutting kids’ money and that is gratifying. The provider tax and nonprofit tax were both eliminated from the budget. Overall the most egregious parts of the original proposed budget are not in the budget now, but we don’t know what it looks like. It takes time to clean up the bill, make it a budget document, get it through the House and Senate, and on the Governor’s desk. The Legislature basically has 10 days to complete all of this work before we’re looking at a partial government shutdown. The Governor has line-item veto power, so this is something to keep in mind. There is so much unknown. The people making decisions now are the leadership. We had our opportunity to reach out to legislators and now we’re in a holding pattern. Though, there is an opportunity to thank those folks who steadfastly supported the kids programs and the waitlists.

**Cullen:** Thank you for your long hours in Augusta! We have been redundant that we are parents and individuals who care about this population. Our opportunity to get in the legislators’ heads is generally late summer into fall; there’s not much we can do now. If Mary Lou can provide this group with a list of people we should thank, and this Coalition were in support, we could send thank-you letters. *(The group indicated enthusiastic approval of this idea and Mary Lou agreed to provide a list of names).*

**Housing:**

**Cullen:** The National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) is hanging in the balance. Mel Watt, Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency ([FHFA](http://www.fhfa.gov/)), directed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to begin funding the NHTF but now some folks in Congress would like to defund it and are attempting to make a law to do just that. As it stands, Maine would receive the state minimum allocation of $3 million each year from the NHTF to serve extremely low income populations. Individuals with ID/DD likely fit into this category. The funding is set to go through MaineHousing, and now won’t be available until summer 2016, unless Congress stops this 12-year effort to make it happen. Sequestration and HUD funding is still hanging in the balance as well. The House THUD (Transportation and Housing & Urban Development) budget is awful. The Senate recently released its THUD appropriations bill and it is almost as bad as the House’s. People with their fingers on the pulse in DC believe this may have been purposeful – creating budgets so bad that there’s no chance they will pass. That process would likely push the budget debate into the fall, when Congress will be forced to act. This provides a small window where there will be pressure to get close to President’s budget, which is far more favorable.

**Office of Child and Family Services Update:**

**Rachel Posner (DHHS OCFS** [**http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/**](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/)**):** As of this morning there is an elaborate diagram of the youth transition process from OCFS to OADS on the OCFS website. It is a complicated flow chart and it can be found in both the [providers section](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cbhs/provider/transition.shtml) and the [parents section](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cbhs/provider/documents/YouthInTransitionFlowchart.pdf) on the website. ([Click here to find the diagram on the Coalition website](http://www.maineparentcoalition.org/june-2015-presentation.html)). Also, staff from OCFS and our IT department are out training children’s case managers on how to put information for transition age youth it into our system, which is shared between OCFS and OADS.

**Katrina Ringrose (Disability Rights Maine** [**www.drcme.org**](http://www.drcme.org/)**):** We now have two children’s advocates. Disability Rights Maine (DRM) has always done children’s advocacy in some sense, but now we have two advocates that will do statewide advocacy. As part of that, we are collaborating with the Special Education team to do statewide training for case managers, as often times they are our direct link to individuals and families.

**Other Business, Announcements:**

* It was suggested that the Coalition website have more comprehensive information on services available.
* It was stated that it might be timely to consider the possibility of this Coalition affiliating with a national disability association.
* A parent mentioned that her daughter just finished a 10-week Girls on the Run program. Kids have the right to participate in programs; with the volunteer programs parents may have to be gently persuasive.

**Cullen:** Check out our updated website [www.maineparentcoalition.org](http://www.maineparentcoalition.org)! You can find the title of any of our past presentations: Click the link, and you will be right in the minutes. The website can always use more pictures!

**Cullen:** At our next meeting on **July 13, 2015,** our featured speaker will be **Pamela Carnie, Coordinator, Volunteer Correspondent Program. Topic: Overview of the Volunteer Correspondent Program, which formed in the late 1970’s and plays a key role in people’s lives. Also featured will be Dick O’Meara, Special Education Attorney. Topic: An overview of informative cases on which he has been active in supporting parents and children, ensuring their needs are met within the Special Education System.**

Unless changed, Coalition meetings are on the 2nd Monday of the month from 12-2pm (307 Cumberland Ave., Portland).