



Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2021

Attendees:

Dawson Robertson, Michelle Henry, Meghan Smallwood, Alesia Richter, Alexandra Berry, Camryn Bates, Erica Lewis, Kathy Land, Kellie Rowden-Racette, Missie Baxter, Aida Lebbos, Ann Scholz, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Doris Jacobs, Dianne Nagle, Naysha Conway-Hart, Laura Parsons, Ihuoma Emenuga

Guests: Meredith Gregoire-Cope (HCPSS), Samantha Norris (Service Coordination)

Absent:

Stephanie Adibe, Susan Potts, Ernestine Bridges, Jemira Sarratt, Stephanie Discepolo, Lea Fant, Paul Linkens, Cindy Parr, Janice Yetter, Stephanie Hayes

Meeting called to order at 8:32am.

Welcome and Introductions

D. Robertson welcomed new Commission members and shared the Commission's Mission Statement and agenda.

Approval of Minutes

M. Henry made a motion to approve the September 2021 minutes. M. Baxter seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Membership

D. Robertson shared that the following members were newly appointed: Cassandra Buffington-Bates, Aida Lebbos, Ihuoma Emenuga, Alesia Richter, and Kellie Rowden-Racette.

The following members introduced themselves to the Commission:

Erica Lewis, Department of Community Resources and Services in ADA Coordination (with Michelle Henry)

Dawson Robertson, Co-Chair of Howard County Commission. Program Head of Transition Services for HCPSS

Missie Baxter, Instructional Facilitator for high schools in HCPSS

Meghan Smallwood, Transition Specialist for HCPSS

Laura Parsons, Transition Specialist for HCPSS

Meredith Gregoire-Cope, Transition Specialist for HCPSS
Ann Scholz, Family Support and Resource Center. Parent of a transitioned student
Dianne Nagle, Associate Director of Project Access program at HCC
Alexandra Berry, Former student member, currently Community Member
Katie Collins-Ihrke, Executive Director for ARI, Center for Independent Living representative
Samantha Norris and Kathy Land, Supervisors for Service Coordination.
Naysha Conway-Hart , Director for Humanim Transition Services, Chair of Employment
Committee
Doris Jacobs, Humanim Transition Services

D. Robertson is currently looking for a current parent of a student who would take the role as a Co-Chair of the Transition Commission. Any parent of a current HCPSS student who would like to serve as co-chair, can send an email to Michelle Henry: mhenry@howardcountymd.gov .

Featured Presentation

S. Norris (Service Coordination) shared updates from DDA. Currently, each provider is its own business, so reopening plans vary. Many providers are in person now. Looking at getting people in the community and out of the day program building. Some are smaller, looking at small groups of 4 people. Then they may work on introducing another group. Other providers are rolling out the entire group in day services. The common theme is encouraging people to get back out in the community and trying to be in smaller groups. Everyone has to wear a mask. Majority is vaccinated. Some providers are implementing assigned seating to limit exposure. Some services are completely community based. Transportation hub-people picked up and then taken right out into community instead of going to the program. Residential are not allowing unvaccinated family members into home. Will visit outside or in community places instead. Many programs still not allowing visits from CCS or families. Meeting out in the community too. It will look a bit different when touring.

Linwood-accepting new referrals and letting people tour in-person with caution

Humanim- accepting new referrals and conducting virtual tours

ARC- not accepting new referrals

Emerge- openings, but can't start due to staffing

Athelas- accepting referrals and scheduling virtual tours and limited in person meetings.

Openings, but can't start due to staffing

There is an uptick in GTYI entering into self-directed services

Waiver has been taking 1-2 months

Barriers and Challenges occurring: Staffing. Hiring bonuses if vaccinated or bonus for people who are vaccinated/staff who get vaccinated.

Transportation (challenge for individuals that are not receiving Community Living Group home services). Vehicles to offer transportation. Many providers had to get rid of their vehicles during

the pandemic. Figuring out what transportation routes could look like with being in the community.

Because of lack of staffing-impacted providers not accepting participants which results in a delayed start of services (slows down the transition process)

Can always change services at any time. If the provider you really are interested in is not able to accept new clients, start with self-directed and then switch when they are able to meet the needs.

BCPS and Baltimore city are offering monthly workshops and topics instead of a transition fair this year.

DORS- welcoming in person visits as their offices are open and are mostly fully staffed. Referral process has changed. Documents need to be sent to their assigned Counselor.

Counselors are trying to gather documentation to submit matrix score by the end of October.

CCS- virtual visits are ending, starting Dec 31st. Services cannot exceed the legal requirements. Having family act as paid employees for more than 40 hours a week. is ending. Hiring relatives and legally responsible parties for select services is ending.

D. Robertson asked if people were moving towards SDS because of COVID. S. Norris stated that they have seen an increase in families moving towards it because agencies are not accepting clients and the transition timeline is held up. Employment can be customized whereas with agencies it is different. If a parent is interested in SDS, S. Norris advises talking to their CCS to explore the process. K. Land added that DDA's website has a self-directed handbook available with a lot of additional information.

D. Robertson asked about the Autism Waiver. The Autism Waiver was extended last year if people were not able to transition to DDA services in a timely manner. The idea was to cover that time frame so there was no gap in services between the two.

A. Scholz asked if there was an impact on staffing with CCSs and Service Coordination. S. Norris mentioned all around everyone is feeling the staffing shortage. Retention and recruitment have been big barriers. They are looking at ways to hire more CCSs. Also looking at ways to keep people from leaving. Using other coordinators from areas to help.

A. Lebbos asked if the Commission had a journey map to help new members to understand the lay of the land with the services are right now. How can parents understand how all of these agencies and providers fit together. S. Norris shared it is really putting the individual in the center and see what a good life would look like for them and which provider meets their needs the best.

I. Emenuga mentioned that she deals with a lot of this for a living as a physician, and if she is confused she can't imagine what other parents are going through. She has many patients with disabilities. She said there has to be a better way. She was introduced to all of the information when her daughter came to Cedar Lane by meeting with the Transition Specialist. But she feels parents need to be exposed to this information earlier, when the child is much younger.

S. Norris shared the school piece shares the transition. It needs to start in elementary school. D. Robertson stated that legally the school system is not required until age 14 to discuss transition, however it is an area that needs to be expanded. There are so many different people, processes, and hoops it all needs to be streamlined.

K. Rowden-Racette shared the school does explain it but you need a flow chart in order to connect it all. If everyone uses the same one it would be much easier. Once you are out of the school you look at it on a different resource so you are relearning it again. The same flow chart needs to be looked at from day one. She needs a cheat sheet with all of the acronyms.

S. Norris stated that starting at 4 years old and entering adult services at 21 years old, think about how many times the service models will change in those years. It is ever changing, for positive reasons, so that is a big caveat. Services are not a huge umbrella anymore. They are a puzzle piece. Looking at the person as a whole, finding the gaps where the puzzle pieces can fit and support the gaps. That is the philosophy change that has occurred-more individualistic, not as concrete. But each person should look different and have their own service needs and goals.

K. Rowden-Racette shared there are certain core things that haven't changed that can be layered over it. K. Land said that they could come up with a loose guide for a future transition meeting for parents.

A. Richter mentioned at every level, people are experts at that level. Even if there was one person at each level who was the expert of the next level as you get ready to transition to middle or high, give them some type of background or education on the next level. That would have been extremely helpful as a parent. People want to answer the questions at elementary and middle levels but don't necessarily have the knowledge.

Thinks about some of our underserved members of the community who don't have the ability to advocate. How do we reach that group?

S. Norris mentioned prior, they only met with families once a year. Now they are meeting quarterly with families. The idea is once an individual turns 18, they want to be on the proactive end to help with the transition process and have that connection with the school end. Finding ways to build those relationships earlier on.

K. Land said their roadblock is they typically don't receive referrals from DDA until 18. So its hard to get to them prior to that. Education prior to that comes from the school.

S. Norris encourages people to get involved at the legislative level. A lot of the time it is at the state level. Advocating on a policy level for SSI, for example, would help.

K. Rowden-Racette asked if there are specific types of legislature that are trying to currently fix these issues. Howard County Representative might be the first contact to try. That can help identify what might be currently debated or discussed.

D. Robertson shared the Transition Specialist is the point of contact to guide you and provide the resources. Also suggested talking to friends who have walked the path to get advice. Howard County Autism society is a great resource.

M. Henry reiterated that the transition focus needs to start earlier, before high school. We as a commission need to promote that effort in some way. It needs to be mulled over, given some thought, and as a commission we can come up with a solid recommendation to the school system and government. We can make recommendations to the county council.

S. Norris asked if any commission members are currently involved in early intervention or child find. That might be a good next step to open it up. Janice Yetter, the coordinator of special education services, is a member of the commission. D. Robertson will check in with Janice to ask about that.

A. Scholz agrees that we need to reach out earlier. Shared there was a workshop for middle school families last school year which had a smaller turnout. It is hard to get families to understand the importance of getting the transition information early.

A. Richter agreed, when she went through it she recalls seeing this information and thinking it was too early for her. She relied on information from the case manager, rather than the school system. If a case manager was telling a parent that this information was important, it would encourage families to attend more. Someone with a relationship would make them want to go more.

I. Emenuga shared young parents may still be in denial and holding on to hope that at 21, their child will "recover". So at 5 or 6 years old, things might not stick. We need to create a structure they can easily plug into when the wool is pulled back from their eyes.

C. Buffington-Bates shared you are fed so much information at the beginning from so many different places. Support group for the younger parents to voice their concerns and frustrations for a listening ear. It is a lot to deal with. Projecting down to age 21 or high school years, there is so much information that needs to be funneled out and have that landscape. Connections and relationships are so important. Who you know and work with in elementary school is totally different than high school. There needs to be transparency in the school system and with Coordinators to let the parents know exactly what they are dealing with.

D. Robertson shared this information is disseminated by government. It needs to be given to families in a variety of ways, not just in school.

S. Norris shared that you can vendor a day service with self-directed to allow you to have a hybrid model of provider and SDS.

Community Sub Group

D. Robertson shared in March 2022 there are plans to have a transition symposium with HCPSS in person in order to bring all of the community providers together under one roof. If it cannot happen in person, there will be a weekly, virtual workshop series in March 2022

Education Sub Group

The group has not met over COVID. A. Scholz has plans to work on a flowchart, and is looking for volunteers to help.

Employment Sub Group

D. Jacobs shared that all of the providers are recovering from pandemic challenges. They are trying to get back into the swing of meeting quarterly and will work on altering previous goals from before COVID.

Ann shared meeting with the transition specialist during 9th grade really gave them the big picture, see what the options were, and was very informative. Parents should ask to meet with them.

Michelle Henry shared that the parent has a lot of authority of who should be at the IEP meetings. They should be at that table long before they are exiting to start thinking about the things that impact transition.

Dawson shared if parents give consent, we are required by law to invite agencies.

HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities

D. Robertson shared that December 6th-10th is Inclusive Education Week. There will be a Public Forum at the Board of Ed. Meeting on December 7th.

The Career and Community Exploration (CCE) program has been able to provide work opportunities to all the work programs in the school system. Students are helping teacher with bulletin boards and packets and practicing hands on, transferrable skills. The programs are inching closer to more community engagement. Stephanie Hayes has been coordinating all of these services.

M. Smallwood shared information on upcoming workshops. A virtual Self-Directed Informational Session will be held on November 11th at 4pm over Zoom. A virtual Self-Directed Parent Panel will be held on December 1st at 4pm over Google Meet. Kathy Land will be presenting on the GTYI timeline for families on December 8th at 11am over Google Meet. There

will also be a virtual presentation on the Alternatives to Guardianship on December 14th at 4pm over Google Meet.

A. Scholz is currently working on a new acronyms list for distribution. She is also thinking about creating a transition acronym list. Anyone who is interested in working to develop a transition flow chart can e-mail her at ann_scholz@hcpss.org.

Office on Disabilities

M. Henry shared the Commission on Disabilities was planning to display winning pieces of artwork from the year before for the 30th anniversary of ADA at the Counties Diversity Fair however it was cancelled. The Disabilities Commission is putting it on permanent display at Patuxent Woods building. Stephanie Adibe will speak with County Executive office having artwork displayed at other county office building before permanently being displayed at Patuxent Woods to raise public awareness.

E. Lewis shared information on a virtual presentation on Wednesday 11/17 from 9:30-11:30am via WebEx. It will discuss funding resources for Home Accessibility Modifications.

Project Access/HCC

D. Nagle is anticipating a return onto campus this summer for Project Access. She has been speaking with the school system to prepare and see what the students can handle this summer. Information should be coming out very soon. It is not like a summer camp, students need to apply and go through an interview process. Transition Specialists can provide information to any interested families.

Service Coordination/DDA

K. Land shared that she provided a DDA workshop, along with Erin Schantz from The Coordinating Center, for HCPSS families in October. There were about 50 families in attendance.

Providers

D. Jacobs (Humanim) shared updates for Youth Transition Services. They are currently in the middle of the fall cohort for WBLEs, Start on Success in person, and Start on Success virtual program. They are also currently running STEP (VR program). In the past quarter, they have received four new referrals. Two of the four referrals already have employment. WE-STEP, the volunteer subdivision under STEP in collaboration with Homewood Center is running. There are five students volunteering at YMCA in Ellicott City. It is slow but moving. Howard County Hospital has allowed them to return for paid training positions-8 week opportunity. Volunteer services is dedicated to high school aged students under the Pre-ets programs funded by DORS

Vocational Rehabilitation services with DORS is dedicated to recently graduated high school student with disabilities without DDA funding. This is a 3 year program to aid with securing paid competitive employment.

For more information on the programs, you can contact:

youth-services@humanim.org

step@humanim.org

You can also contact Doris directly at - djacobs@humanim.org 410-807-1928

Member Updates

A. Berry is currently considering switching to self-directed services. However, it will be hard for both her and her parents.

A. Lebbos shared that her son graduated from MHHS over 10 years ago. He has been working at the APL for 8 years.

K. Rowden-Racette shared that her son is transitioning right now. She would like to help make things accessible for everyone.

I. Emenuga shared that she wants to help build for the community who may not have that support system behind them.

C. Buffington-Bates shared that she is very passionate about this group in our society and is excited to work on the commission.

Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:30am.

Upcoming 2021-22 Meetings:

January 13

March 10

May 12