

**Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)**

**Monday, January 29, 2018**

**Alabama Industrial Development Training Center**

The AIACC met on Monday, January 29, 2018, at the Alabama Industrial Development Training Center. The meeting was called to order by Chair, Senator Cam Ward. Also in attendance were Council members: Commissioner Lynn Beshear, Fred Biasini, Brooke Bowles, Commissioner Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Robert Caldwell, Greg Carlson, Suzanne Dowling, Megan Everett, Doris Hill, Melanie Jones, Sarah Ryan, Todd Tomerlin, and Karen Willis. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Beverly Churchwell on behalf of Stephanie Azar, Sondra Landers on behalf of Nancy Buckner, Laurie Eldridge-Auffant on behalf of Scott Harris, Vera Hendrix on behalf of John Mascia, Justin Schwartz on behalf of Myriam Peralta, Tina Sanders on behalf of Ed Richardson, and Dianna Tullier on behalf of Jeana Ross. Also in attendance was Anna McConnell, State Autism Coordinator.

The minutes from the October 16, 2017 meeting were approved and adopted.

Chairperson Comments: Senator Ward noted that the legislative session started January 9<sup>th</sup>. This is an election year, and tends to be less controversial. Ward sees a good chance for expanded Regional Autism Network funding, as it has been expanded the past two years. Medicaid growth has not greatly stressed the General Fund budget, so we hope that Mental Health and other agencies can receive support that hasn't been as available since the recession.

Lead Agency Comments: Commissioner Beshear welcomed the group. She has been in her role for 7 months now. She shared her connection to and passion for helping those with ASD. She expressed that she is fully committed to the mission of the AIACC.

State Coordinator Comments: Anna McConnell noted that the Annual Report will be sent via email to the AIACC and mailing list, as well as to the legislature. Beth Johns from UAB School of Public Health discussed the upcoming partnership to work on the AIACC Strategic Plan, which will include a Strategic Plan. This will include qualitative and quantitative data, to tell the story of progression of the AIACC and Alabama over the past, and to help plan for the future in relation to policy and advocacy. The last Autism Needs Assessment was completed in 2009. Julie Preskitt, Martha Wingate, Matt Fifolt, and Beth Johns will be working on this project. Interviews and surveys will be conducted in this work.

Bylaws and Membership: Sarah Ryan noted we are still waiting on appointment letters for reappointment for four members and one new appointment.

Funding and Finance: Greg Carlson recommended "Insurance for Autism Alabama" Facebook group. It is a site with that families are using for sharing information for navigating access to services. Autism Speaks put together a list of national companies that have coverage for ABA therapy, available in handouts. Clarification on which companies are self- or fully-funded and which are governed by ERISA has been a major question asked. Some self-funded companies have chosen to cover ABA without legislation. Bama Hager encouraged any families with questions to reach out to Autism Society of Alabama or the Facebook group previously noted for help navigating coverage. Families should continue to ask their Human Resources departments of their employers to request coverage if not already covered. The State Employee Insurance Board chose to cover ABA services this year, earlier than required. Greg Carlson remarked that this is a learning process for all involved as new coverage is developed and implemented. Senator Ward noted that although there are navigation issues, we have made much positive movement toward coverage for those in Alabama.

Department of Mental Health Associate Commissioner Courtney Tarver discussed public coverage for ASD. He noted that ADAP would chime in as well if needed. There is a workgroup that has developed out of a settlement agreement with ADAP and the State that is tasked with making recommendations on services for those with ASD. The workgroup has been organized, met, and divided into committees. Several members of the AIACC and audience members are part of the workgroup. The programming should be laid out in the coming months. Most of the work will take place between now and the summer. After that planning period, public information and training is expected.

Marc Williams reported for the Behavior Analyst Licensing Board. There are currently 155 licensed behavior analysts in Alabama. The Board is meeting monthly until the majority of applications are processed. The next meeting is February 9. There are still several applications that were received after December 1 deadline for submitted, so there has not yet been an identified date when a licensed will be required to practice. The Board will continue to assess this at the monthly meetings and will give a 30 days' notice when licensure requirement goes into effect. Marc noted that DMH has been a great support and Mitchell's Place has been providing a central meeting location for the Board. Senator Ward asked if there was a geographical mapping of where licensed BCBAs were located. Williams noted that is not currently available. He would expect BCBAs to be more likely to be population centers (Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile). The rural areas are greatly lacking in access to BCBAs. Greg Carlson asked if a new person were to come into the state, if they would be able to apply after the deadline.

Williams said the deadline is for those who are currently practicing. It operates just like a physician who needs to be licensed. Those penalties are not in effect right now until things fall into place. Applications will always be accepted.

Anna McConnell reported on Recruitment and Retention of BCBA's. There are opportunities for private and public coverage that expand the need for capacity, especially in BCBA. The Licensure Board, AAPN members, AIACC members and university folks came together to identify opportunities and needs in the state. BCBA is offered at Auburn University, Jacksonville State, and UAH (in 2018). The BCaBA training is available through UNA and Troy. More students, more faculty, a mechanism for students to have incentive to stay in-state after completed training and certification, and time for supervisors to provide expanded supervision were among the identified needs. Recommendations included funding for university programs, full or partial scholarships, stipends or funding for site supervisors so they can increase time with students, and payment of licensure fees for those students who are paying their time back by staying in state. Partnerships between providers and institutions was also highly recommended. One example is a partnership with UAH and Birmingham providers. Bama Hager said that Representative Jim Patterson's campaign funds were dissolved after his passing. ASA received almost \$10,000 of those funds and would like to find a way to fund students in development of ABA programs in Alabama. Bama noted she thinks this would be something that he would have greatly supported and it is a way to honor him.

Regional Autism Networks: Fred Biasini reported that in the first year, when only USA, Auburn, and UAB were designated RAN sites, over 2500 contacts were made with professionals, families, or educators via the RAN. Three hundred families received consultation or technical assistance, 400 were served by professional training, and 1800 people were reached through public education. This year, UA and UAH were added. It does take time to get a new RAN site up and running. Sarah Ryan was at UA, and has recently moved to UAB Civitan Sparks Clinics.

Amy Mitchell, RAN Director at USA, noticed an extreme shortage of ABA services in South Alabama. The USA RAN with ASA hosted a dinner for BCBA's, with 15 in attendance. It was a great opportunity to listen to the issues surrounding billing and other collaboration opportunities. USA is working on developing a training program for Applied Behavior Analysis through the Department of Psychology. Autism Society in Mobile has been a great collaborator. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Autism Matters conference (ASA partnering with RAN) has a strong line up this year. Justin Schwartz, Angie Barber, special education attorneys will be speaking, as well as new BCBA's in the area. It is a conference for parents and providers.

Lizzie Griffith, RAN Director for UAB, noted that Anne Brisendine will be assisting the UAB RAN and helping with developing infrastructure for all the RANs. Lizzie also introduced intern Sarah Spradlin. Many of the phone calls the UAB RAN have received have been adults that have needed more involved coordination. Physicians and nurse practitioners have been the primary callers for Technical Assistance and Consultation needs. This has led to Professional Training opportunities. Public Education has been the primary focus. Last year, topics include sleep and toilet training (25 attendees each). A training calendar has been developed for this year for monthly trainings. ASA has been a great partner. Community Education Workshops will be provided at the Hoover Library in Birmingham on the last Monday of the month. Goals for future trainings include utilizing technology to connect with other RAN sites, as families are traveling from across the state to attend. Data on effectiveness of the trainings will also be collected. Including outreach to Spanish-speaking population is also a goal. Fred Biasini noted that the RAN has been instrumental in access to other grants. Expanded funding for RANs would be very helpful for the group.

Doris Hill, Auburn RAN Director, expressed gratitude for the collaboration and collegiality among RAN directors across universities. Auburn will be offering an autism benefit up to age 18 with caps. This is a voluntary offering. Doris is hoping to expand RAN constituency board membership. Sharing resources has been helpful for all universities as they grow together. This year, the RANs are working on a listserv to connect with families and providers in the region. Doris presented at ALABA, DHR, and MEGA, among other conferences and trainings, and noted how collaboration within the university has helped spread the word on the RAN's presence. These trainings have been fruitful based on the follow up calls received from attendees needing further assistance. Many of the calls received were for social skills, but many are also complicated calls with families seeking residential placement and/or difficult behaviors, especially among aging parents. Advocacy groups as part of the Constituency Board has been valuable to Auburn and all RAN sites.

Anna McConnell remarked that the RAN Conference will be held on February 22 for RAN directors, constituency board members, and related university personnel. Anna asked the group to let her know of specific training needs. She also referenced Justin Schwartz's idea for ECHO for Educators.

Senator Ward complimented the collaborative work of the RANs and the education provided. Having someone to call and talk to is invaluable for families.

Public Awareness: Melanie Jones remarked that they continue to focus on Autism Friendly Alabama. Sensory friendly movies, symphony, Santa, etc. are held statewide. ASA will partner with Triumph, they will be working to offer information to those employers and businesses. Brooke Bowles noted that

hospitality, educational institutions, and other businesses have expressed strong interest in becoming Autism Friendly. There is opportunity to recognized businesses for their interest. Angel Loewen and Michelle McDaniel of ASA in South Alabama created a CARE binder for families they talk to, especially those whose child has a recent diagnosis. This was piloted and well received in the South AL region and has expanded to statewide. This provides information and place to keep things organized related to their child. If providers or agencies have information that needs to be included in the CARE binder going to families, let Angel or Michelle know.

Bama said that ASA's Autism Legislative Day is Tuesday, March 6 between 10-3 pm. Lunch will be provided. Attendees will be thanking legislators for their support on autism insurance last year, and also educating lawmakers of upcoming issues and needs related to adult services and transition.

Senator Ward asked about PEEHIP's move to cover ABA therapy, as SEIB chose to cover ABA early. When SEIB met, they determined the cost would not be so great to impact insurance premiums. Ward asked if PEEHIP had any of that data. They have a deadline in last year's legislation. Greg Carlson noted that SEIB had saved money in one program and was able to move up implementation.

Brooke Bowles announced that there is a conference June 7-9 – the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered National Conference. They are seeking self-advocate presenters. Susan Ellis has more information. They are expecting 800 attendees in Birmingham at the Sheraton.

Melanie Jones announced that Autism Society of Alabama has changed locations. Their new address is 4260 Cahaba Heights Court, Suite 188, 35243. ASA is looking to hire a part time staff person in North AL as a resource coordinator.

Sarah O'Kelley announced that the Alabama Autism Providers Network (AAPN) will be meeting immediately after the AIACC meeting. No public portion this meeting, as several members have a conflict. Next quarterly meeting will include a public meeting. As Chair of the Planning Committee for the Alabama Autism Planning Conference, Sarah announced that the conference will be held Friday, February 23 at Bryant Conference Center. Please register online at [autism.ua.edu](http://autism.ua.edu). Last year, the conference sold out (500 people). This year, there will be overflow via video feed for walk up registrations. Pre-registration guarantees you a seat in the main room.

Justin Schwartz mentioned ECHO for Autism for pediatricians and health care providers. This will be another cycle every other Friday. Recruitment has been focused on practice managers and primary

care providers. The ECHO model can be utilized for many needs. One of the areas discussed is using ECHO in the educational realm. There are providers interested in their trainings already through the UAB RAN. The ECHO model would be an ideal way to provide opportunities for continuing education specific to ASD. If there is interest in attending an ECHO Autism session, you can attend online to see how it works.

Commissioner Beshear commented that this meeting was very informative. She emphasized workforce development and capacity building. Healthcare in general is an area that needs much attention as fewer students are entering the healthcare field. The quality of life issues in our state impacts our ability to attract workforce or keep students here. Workforce development is a key pillar that she is interested in as Commissioner of DMH. As a state without many monetary resources, the passion and innovative ways has left an impression. She urged Senator Ward to let her and the group know if there is something we can do to educate the Legislature on the importance on quality of life and how that impacts attraction of a behavioral healthcare workforce.

Senator Ward remarked on the importance of Autism Legislative Day. In the past, the questions asked were "What is it?" and "How do you fix it?". The discussions have drastically changed because people are engaged and talking with their commissioners.

Hanes Swingle noted that USA is discussing voluntarily covering ABA therapy. Senator Ward said University lobbyists would be a good contact to have in this discussion as they become familiar with RAN and other ways to be involved. Praise is due for those that have chosen to offer coverage, to encourage others to choose to offer coverage too.

Tina Sanders announced that the Summer Learning Conference, formerly MEGA, will be offered over the summer.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Next meeting: Monday, April 9, 2018

Recording Secretary

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A. McConnell