

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

Alabama Industrial Development Training Center

The AIACC met on Tuesday, January 27th, 2015, at the Alabama Industrial Development Training Center. The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair, Greg Carlson. Also in attendance were Council members: Fred Biasini, Brooke Bowles, Sally Davis, Joshua Heard, Doris Hill, Elmyra Jones, Melanie Jones, Sarah Ryan and Karen Willis. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Russell Green on behalf of Stephanie Azar, Lisa Highfield on behalf of Thomas Bice, Sonia Cleckler on behalf of Cary Boswell, Erin Wofford on behalf of Nancy Buckner, Hanes Swingle on behalf of Miriam Peralta, Courtney Tarver on behalf of Jim Reddoch, and Dawn Ellis on behalf of Don Williamson.

The minutes from the October 20, 2014 meeting were approved and adopted.

Mr. Carlson shared from the perspective of the Funding Committee, that he recently attended an Autism Speaks legal summit with attorneys from all over the country as well as experts from the Autism Speaks national group. The interest is in how insurance coverage for the diagnosis of Autism is being increased across the country. Many large employers are realizing that to hire and retain technical staff, it is important to provide insurance coverage for family members with Autism. The list of companies who now provide coverage has grown, and recently, Southern Company has added this benefit. The Funding and Finance Committee is working on ways to share information with more companies about the benefit of having Autism coverage in their plans. Many of the plans are provided by, or administered by, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and there has been work with them on RCO development. They are interested in hearing how larger companies, particularly, are including ABA coverage to their employees. Autism Speaks has offered to help spread the word on this important issue.

Mr. Carlson also recently met with Russell Green of Medicaid on the EPSDT program. Courts are now affirming that if a service (ABA or other) is included in the doctor's EPSDT plan, it is a mandatory service for that child. Per CMS, this would be regardless of whether that service is provided in other programs.

A draft contract for Regional Care Organizations (RCOs) passes the EPSDT responsibility on to them. Mr. Carlson has been working with an RCO group and wants to make sure they have some knowledge of the legal aspects of the EPSDT program.

Tricare is making an effort to improve the approval process for ABA coverage, as well as the re-approvals. This is a national effort that is due to attention and pressure from groups like Autism Speaks. Their organization is currently seeking the support of a Republican Senator who will sign off on a letter to the Office of Personnel Management that would require ABA coverage be included for Federal employees in Alabama, just as Federal employees in neighboring states receive.

In addition, he was recently made aware of a letter from the U.S. Department of Education that explains that ABA is a covered service in the IDEA plan, and it is not up to a state to make that decision.

Mr. Carlson stated that many of the issues that have been addressed in the past are finally "coming to a head" and he looks forward to working with everyone on the council toward solutions.

Mr. Biasini shared on behalf of Whitney Meade of the Accountability committee that the committee is working on developing a list of best practices based on research. She has emailed the committee members to choose the areas in which they would be interested in doing research, and anyone else can contact Whitney if they are interested in helping out.

Brooke Bowles of the Accessibility group shared that they have a committee formed and they are having their first meeting on February 16th at the Triumph office in Birmingham at 10:00 a.m. They also are recruiting members, so interested parties should get in touch with Brooke to join the committee.

Mr. Carlson shared that although the Funding and Finance Committee has not met, they have been in touch and are working toward obtaining funds to be used to establish the Regional Centers. The UAB School of Public Health has developed a document that will serve as a springboard for requesting money from the legislature. Drafts have been provided to Ms. McConnell and to Senator Ward. The Funding and Finance Committee will meet in February along with Mr. Biasini who is the Chair of the Regional Networks Committee, as well as others, to

review the document for edits. When the document is complete, it will be presented to the Council. They also hope to meet with Senator Ward prior to the legislature's reconvening in March.

Mr. Biasini of the Regional Networks Committee shared that they have not met yet to develop an RFP because they are waiting on the potential funds. They plan to meet following the Funding and Finance Committee meeting and begin to draft a plan.

Melanie Jones, Chair of the Public Awareness Committee shares they are currently working to raise awareness of the needs of the Autism community. They had their first meeting December 3rd. They decided they would focus on Alabama Businesses becoming Autism Friendly. They have a decal designed and will further develop the program by creating the mechanics by which to implement the effort. They have surveyed parents for input and suggestions on how to train these places of business to meet the goal of being Autism Friendly. Brooke Bowles of Triumph Services suggested businesses who currently employ persons with Autism might be a great place to start in implementing this program.

Courtney Tarver, Associate Commissioner, Division of Developmental Disabilities within the Department of Mental Health shared the announcement from the Department of the Board Members of the newly formed Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensing Board. Their first order of business will be to work on regulations for the Board, describing the application and licensure processes. When those are finalized, a notice will go out and individuals can begin applying for licensure in the State of Alabama.

Mr. Tarver also shared that one of the biggest challenges being faced right now is funding. All of the represented agencies would like to be in a position to serve every individual in need, but there are currently no funds to provide for that. We have to make clear to legislators that the services are needed and funds need to be provided. These issues need to be elevated in awareness, so that current funding can be maintained and expanded.

Member updates:

Lisa Highfield of the Department of Education shared an update on the Alabama Autism Initiative. The program has been underway for a year, and is going strong with great results. Glenwood is receiving many requests for Autism Diagnostic Evaluations. The Department of

Education is covered up with requests for individual student consultations with the BCBA. And, there are many requests for ABA training through the Learning Tree. The Schools systems are pleased. They are able to learn and provide services, at no cost to them, which they might not be able to otherwise. The goals of the initiative are to build capacity so teachers know how to handle children and provide improved services, as well as start early and keep children in their communities and in their schools. Lisa has been tracking requests and just about every county, every city system is aware of the program. Education is also partnering with DHR and DMH through monthly meetings to share children and their needs, in an effort for each agency to understand what the other agency does. There is a lot of work to be done, but great progress has been made.

Russell Green with Medicaid shared that the staff recently had the opportunity to brief some of the senior Medicaid officials, as well as some of the senior Health officials to discuss current issues as related to the associated legalities. The upside is that the language in the State Plan supports recipients receiving the services, and has been previously stated further progress will depend on funding. There have been many good ideas from various sources. Currently they are awaiting the outcome of discussion between political leadership and health leadership.

Doris Hill shared that an effort that began two years ago, has become a reality with the help of Samantha Wadsworth and Andrea Nelson from Lakeshore Connections. The goal was to replicate their program of improving social skills for young adults with lessons and outings to work on social skills leading to employment has become a reality. After meeting with Tina Dortch of Vocational Rehab and receiving backing, as well as support from local advocacy groups and area interest, they began in January with 16 participants at Southern Union in Auburn. They are currently looking into grants for funding graduate students to validate and do some research.

Sarah Ryan reminded attendees of the upcoming Alabama Autism Conference coming up February 27th in Tuscaloosa.

Brooke Bowles announced the 2nd Annual Autism Friendly Barons Game to be held in Birmingham, May 3rd at 3:00 p.m. There will be a planning meeting for the game on February 23rd at 11:00 a.m. Legions Field. Anyone who is interested in helping with the planning is encouraged to join in.

Bama Folsom Hager, shared that the Autism Society Legislative Day will be March 17th. Everyone is invited to attend. The Project Lifesaver Grant with the DD Council has just been finished, and there are only eight counties in the state that don't have Project Lifesaver. They are currently working on funds to get the program in those last eight counties. Melanie Jones added that during April, which is Autism Awareness Month, they are encouraging everyone to "Light it Up Blue" on World Autism Awareness Day, April 2nd. The Autism Society has blue bulbs for sale, in addition to blue t-shirts. Every Saturday in the Month of April, there will be an Autism Walk, throughout the state. Dates and locations can be found on the Autism Society website – walkforautismal.com.

Sarah O'Kelley spoke about the Autism Conference. This will be the 14th annual conference with the goal of pulling together nationally known evidence-based practice presenters. That being said, it is a provider, parent, teacher, and community –friendly conference. There is a workshop component in the afternoons with some hands-on activities. There is still time for exhibitors and sponsors to participate in the conference. The website is autism.ua.edu.

Jamey Durham of Public Health shared with the Council that the Alabama Department of Public Health is working on a form of Autism ID. An Autism Rule has been developed and is currently in the Public Comment Period. The program will provide a card that will identify individuals on the Spectrum that maybe used when coming in contact with first responders. The individual must have a form completed by a healthcare professional that confirms the ASD diagnosis. That form will go to the County Health Department where the individual may then apply for the card for a \$10 fee. The card will identify the individual, as well as a point of contact. It will not be a picture ID at this time. Replacement cards will be available after re-certification from a health provider and a fee of \$5. Jamey is hopeful the implementation will be in April or May. Brooke Bowles made mention of council member Mitchell Lord and his work in advocating an identification method of this type.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Next meeting: Monday, April 13, 2015.

Recording Secretary

C. S. Weldon

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January 27, 2014
Alabama Institute for Training and Development

Minutes submitted and approved

Chairman, Senator Cam Ward

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