

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

Monday, July 19, 2021

Zoom

The AIACC met on Monday, July 19, 2021, via Zoom (due to COVID-19 meeting capacity restrictions). The meeting was called to order by Dr. Erich Grommet. Also in attendance were Council members: Robert Caldwell, Suzanne Dowling, Dr. Erich Grommet, Dr. Heather Jones, Dr. Sarah O'Kelley, Dr. Whitney Meade, Darryle Powell, Dr. Justin Schwartz, and Chris Stewart. The following proxies were in attendance as well: Marshetia Baldwin for Stephanie Azar, Malissa Valdes-Hubert for Commissioner Boswell, Laurie Eldridge-Auffant for Dr. Scott Harris, Elisabeth Newell for State Superintendent Eric Mackey, Wendi Glass for John Mascia, and Yada Horace for Commissioner Ridling. Also in attendance was Anna McConnell, State Autism Coordinator.

The minutes from April 2021 were unanimously approved.

Lead Agency Comments and State Coordinator Announcements:

Ms. McConnell began with greetings to the forum. There was a question from Dr. Grommet regarding in person meetings resuming. Ms. McConnell did not have an update on the time frame, but she will notify everyone via e-news when more information is available. There are currently some concerns related to the Delta variant which has been prevalent throughout the state. Since AIACC is a part of the Open Meeting Act, the goal is to ensure the safety of council members and to make sure the meetings are accessible to everyone.

New Business:

0-5 Subcommittee:

Sarah O' Kelley noted an update of the team's primary focus in terms of action steps on the collaboration with Early Intervention. The team has also had conversations about expanding, particularly in identification and intervention of young children with Autism. Dr. O' Kelley was able to launch (the first Monday in May) a pilot project within early intervention to perform routine screenings using the M-CHAT and follow-ups with all children entered into the system between 18-30 months. The pilot took place in four sites within Early Intervention throughout the state. It was noted that the uptake has been very good, and the coordinators have been involved and have embraced the pilot project. One of the noted benefits regarding the pilot is that it provides the coordinator with an opportunity to discuss the question of Autism from the providers' standpoint. The goal is to have these children at risk of

Autism be moved into naturalistic developmental behavioral interventions (NDBIs) and supportive of young children with Autism and with Early Intervention programs and have providers who are trained in group strategies specific for the children who fall into this group. Also, children who already have an Autism diagnosis are receiving those interventions as well. Dr. O' Kelley noted that her team has been able to partner with some clinical entities across the state, many who are represented in the Council. She also shared that since Early Intervention is not doing the diagnosis of Autism and once concerns are addressed, the team will facilitate a referral for families. These referrals will go to clinics throughout the state who have agreed to accept priority referrals from early intervention. Dr. Grommet asked about the turnaround time on the appointments for the referral clients. Ms. Suzanne Dowling also posed a similar question regarding the wait time for families. Ms. Mary Beth Vick stated that the providers working with the priority project have been able to see clients/patients in a three-month turnaround time. Dr. O'Kelley noted that realistically we could see a turnaround time of about six months. The implementation team is meeting every other week for monitoring. Also representing for the 0-5 subcommittee is Mary Beth Vick.

6-13 Subcommittee:

Heather Jones noted that her subgroup has been able to meet twice, once in May and again in July. The groups focus point has been discussing the biggest issue in the strategic plan, the research component and gathering information. Her team is hoping to meet with members of the RAN or possibly some clinics to gather information that was discussed for the strategic plan. Dr. Jones also noted that MEGA ended last week; it was a big opportunity for administrators and educators to gather and gain information to share with families in this age group. It was also noted that Elisabeth Newell serves on the subgroup working with the committee sharing information about the Autism Academy through ALSDE. Specifically, they will be sharing on training and working with students with Autism in the classroom for teachers. The committee has also discussed the RAN workshops, the most recent was one with UAB on puberty and getting information out to teachers to share with families. Dr. Jones also noted that the virtual workshops are reaching more people. Cody Farmer and Anna McConnell are also sharing resources offered by Mental Health, which in turn are being shared with teachers and families. Lizzie Taylor posed a question about the UAB workshop and if Dr. Jones' subgroup needed access to materials. Dr. Jones referenced Ms. Elisabeth Newell from ALSDE strategy on reaching out to presenters to get information to the teachers. Dr. Jones noted that from her experience not many teachers knew of the RAN or the resources provided by/through the RAN, the committees continued goal is to keep sharing this information with educators so that they become more familiar with the resources and in turn can provide this information to families. Dr. Whitney Meade noted that needs vary by region. UAH has a lending library of resources accessible to teachers and families, who routinely use the services. Dr.

Meade also shared an occasion when a teacher in their region wanted to try the STAR program. Her school district was reluctant to purchase a program they weren't familiar with but because the teacher was able to access the program through the RAN library, she was able to take the data back to the school system and with her success they were willing to purchase the program for further use.

14-20 Subcommittee:

Dr. Erich Grommet provided an update on the Troy AIACC website for resources (spectrum.troy.edu/chrysalis). Under the Resources tab, the website includes information on the:

- Agency
- Types of resources
- The specific name of the resource
- The hyperlink associated with the agency
- A description for each agency

Mr. Grommet also noted that feedback regarding the site and resources can be sent to him via email at egrommet@troy.edu.

21+ Subcommittee:

Dr. Sarah Ryan reported that the group will be scheduled to meet on the fourth Wednesdays of the month at 4:00pm. The committee will work with the RAN to identify what resources exist (not limited to ASD services), with a specific focus on adult medical providers. Dr. Ryan also noted there are many services and supports that the group needs like employment, housing, mental and medical care. The team will also reach out to other states and their models they are working with and how they are funded and getting connected with the adult side of medical care. Ms. Ryan will meet with the transition team at Children's Hospital tomorrow. The team with Children's Hospital works with transitioning medical care for individuals with various disabilities. The goal is to be able to help support the medical providers of our students, adolescents, and adults who are transitioning into the next phase of care. It was also noted by Dr. Ryan that some of these clients/patients, because of their specific needs, may stay with their pediatric provider longer. It was also noted that the team's goal is to support the providers with a Project Echo approach, especially for those providers in mental health also with a group focus for those providers who are working with adults but may not have had much training on development or neurodevelopment disabilities.

Diagnostics and Health:

Dr. Justin Schwartz noted that his subgroup has been able to meet monthly. A focal point for the group has been staying on pulse with the diagnostics in Alabama, one of which is the go between of Early Intervention to CRS initiatives which are a priority. There is a prioritization of diagnosis of young children across the state, because of that the system will have to keep up with the demand. As more children are diagnosed, we will need to make sure they are able to access services and support. We will also need to take a more in depth look at possible system issues concerning services offered to older children and adults who are diagnosed. A current goal is to look at the system from a broader standpoint with continued cross conversations with subcommittees and groups related to best alleviate those issues. It was also noted that the diagnostic tool was being used more readily on a smaller scale with pediatric providers, specifically in a primary care clinic at UAB. Also, another source could be the DSM-5 checklist when considering priority referrals or priority needs for therapy or services. Dr. Schwartz suggested that symptomatology could be used in the primary care offices to identify/diagnose Autism. Another focus point for the team is working with the RAN to build a database to be used by all the subcommittees so they can get a better understanding of the information being funneled into the system. It was also noted the telehealth services have been used moderately to increase access. The committee continues to check the Medicaid website verifying the extended Covid Emergency Provision, which initially allowed telehealth services using home as the originating site. We hope to continue to advocate for long-term coverage of telehealth services. Telehealth services have proven to be very useful. The team has also discussed exploring clinic models where telehealth factors highly increase the ability of reaching more people. Dr. Schwartz is completely open to any discussions to support the extension and continued expansion. Another topic was the Medical Cannabis Bill recently passed and signed by the Governor. This subcommittee has had a keen interest in trying to navigate from a provider standpoint how the bill affects how we are currently treating and how we can move forward in the future. There has been a lot of discussion regarding the evidence available on the use of medical cannabis and individuals with Autism; the information available hasn't proved to be sufficient. There are mixed reviews with little guidance for those in position to potentially prescribe. We are hoping for more controlled trials for future information. Dr. Schwartz also noted that the committee discussed how to support care for adults with Autism from a medical and mental health standpoint; the subcommittee is also available and ready to assist Dr. Sarah Ryan in that endeavor.

Public Awareness:

Melanie Jones' (Absent) report submitted to Ms. Anna McConnell: The subcommittee is working on information postcards to put in pediatric and primary care facilities throughout the state. They will also include QR codes to local RAN resources. The team is also working on "Carter Kits" with support from Dowlings. Ms. Suzanne Dowling shared that the "Carter Kits" are for first responders (Fire and EMT) and

they contain items that would be helpful to them when/if they are providing services to a child or adult with Autism. They include items like fidget toys, headphones, and social stories. In celebration of Sam's 30th birthday and his love of first responders we were able to raise money for 30 (thirty) kits to be distributed among the Tuscaloosa area! The long-term goal is to have at least one kit in every county of the state.

Regional Autism Network (RAN):

April Coleman noted the collaborative efforts included the MEGA Conference in Mobile. Amy Mitchell served as the liaison. The conference was a great opportunity to share with educators both in-person and virtually (hybrid conference). Earlier in the spring UAB/UAH/UA collaborated to host a virtual public education workshop on IEP development. The workshop was hosted through the UAB RAN with Lizzie Taylor serving as the facilitator. Ms. Coleman and Ms. Ashley McLean served as presenters for the workshop with UAH. The event was virtual with positive attendance from families across the state. The RAN staff continues to meet bimonthly for planning and resource sharing purposes. There is an in-person strategic planning meeting scheduled for October in Auburn, AL. Subgroups from the committee have been working with DMH to improve the RAN database. The projected rollout is this fall, with hopes of improving the way we collect and use data more strategically. The RAN also collaborated with UA and UAB with two federal grants.

USA: Data on direct assistance requests indicated the primary needs of consumers were diagnostic services, adult services, and assistance with education related issues. USA also provided some professional training activities to educators in cooperation with two regional and service centers and the child daycare association. They also provided a zoom training with the Alabama Vocational Rehab to acquaint youth and young adults along with their families to services provided through VR.

UAH: The director, Ashley McClain continues to improve the community outreach across her region. She sends out a weekly newsletter to showcase Autism information and events. She has made new connections with local nonprofits and community service organizations throughout North Alabama and several educational events have been scheduled. She also participated in a drive-thru resource fair with the Autism Society and has become Peer certified this past quarter.

UAB: The UAB RAN is looking to hire a Family Navigator. They will host their first in-person workshop in over a year in August. The topic will be Activities of Daily Living and will be led by occupational therapist from Sparks Clinic and held at North Shelby Library. They also conducted a professional training this summer and made a great connection with the Vice President of Policy at Autism Society of America who was interested in hearing more about their workshops.

AU: The Auburn RAN has served over 140 families and professionals during this past third quarter. They held 10 total training events to reach families (including Spanish and Korean speaking families)

impacted by ASD and DD. They also held or participated in four resource fair events serving a large number of attendees for each event. The Auburn RAN also participated in Resources in the Outfield which was held in the River Region. It could be interesting to replicate this model in other parts of the state. The Auburn RAN also published two articles.

UA: The UA RAN developed resources bags and folders to support families across the region who are either diagnosed or wanting more education or information on resources. The bags were placed in strategic locations such as libraries, therapy clinics, and pediatrician offices. This was done mostly in the Tuscaloosa area, but the team is looking to expand out into more rural parts of the region the fall. The UA RAN also hosted a draft the resources fair in collaboration with hundreds of public libraries, there was also a Spanish interpreter on site. A total of 55 families, including 10 Spanish speaking families received resource bags. Monthly parent education and support group currently take place on zoom, there are plans to consider a hybrid format this fall.

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

Next meeting: Monday, October 18, 2021

Recording Secretary

A. McConnell