

# **DDS North Region Regional Advisory Council**

April 17, 2024

Meeting Minutes – Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams (meeting was recorded)

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Members Present: Kim Little, Chair; Donna Cohen; Shannon Klenk, Cindy Lichtsteiner; Ellyn Little; Sue Prihar; Adrianna Ramirez, Annette Scully; Stacie Silva, DDS North Regional Director (ex-Officio member)

Guests: Deb Richards – Creative Living Community of Connecticut  
Sheila Schwedler, Director of Quality Assurance  
Heather Cowen, NR Planning and Resource Allocation Team (PRAT)  
Elba Caraballo-Supportive Housing

Meeting called to order at 5:03 pm.

- Presentation – Creative Living Community of Connecticut
  - Deb Richards of Creative Living Community of Connecticut (CLCC) shared a slide presentation for the Council members about (CLCC) and explained that CLCC is primarily a volunteer organization except for two part time employees. Their mission has always been to create a shared, inclusive living experience for individuals with and without Autism, intellectual, and developmental disabilities in an agricultural community. Their goals have always been to provide housing for approximately fifty (50) individuals; 25% of those individuals having a disability in an affordable housing arrangement, and residential services for those individuals needing around-the-clock care. CLCC has been in existence for about 12 years and have developed a variety of programs that will eventually transition to the property.
  - The following are highlights from the presentation:
    - CLCC farmland is in the Town of Coventry. They received approval from the Town’s Planning & Zoning Commission for the project. They are currently in the process of amending their approval to make some changes to the plan. The idea is to develop a pocket neighborhood concept and to have social enterprises coming out of the property.
    - CLCC History: established in 2007 as an Emanuel Lutheran Church in Manchester, CT mission team. They awarded the organization a grant that allowed them to create a greenhouse program on its property in Vernon, CT where they do vocational training and continue to have their microgreen business there. They grow and sell microgreens to restaurants in the greater Hartford area.
    - In 2016, CLCC began the process of developing the business plans to create the farm community. In 2018, they purchased 10 acres of land in Coventry, CT to build their vision.
    - This year, CLCC celebrates their 12<sup>th</sup> year as a social enterprise growing microgreens for sale.
    - Their farmstand is located at 2645 Boston Turnpike (Rt. 44) in Coventry, CT. They are open Wednesday through Sunday from May through October. The projects are grown with the helping hands of adults with developmental disabilities.
    - CLCC’s provides farming and greenhouse vocational program that trains approximately 40 individuals each year. They provide respite and social activities in the afternoon to their program participants. Also, they provide Yoga and Recreation during the late Summer at the farm.

Shannon Klenk asked Deb Richards when will the residential property be available. Deb Richards responded that in looking at the Strategic Plan it will be over the next three or four years. Currently they have a house on the property that they are renovating which will probably be the first place that they will make available. They are also trying to decide what infrastructure they need to build first.

Lori Sandora Coughlin asked if the residential property would be open to individuals without disabilities. Absolutely, 75% of the residents would not be individuals with disabilities, responded Deb Richards. Lori also asked what type of structure is envisioned. Deb Richards responded that it is a variety; referred to as a cottage community. It will be relatively small, single, family homes (1, 2, or 3 bedrooms), but designed to be fairly proximity to each other so that there is a lot of community interaction. Lori also asked if the group of individuals that are interested in the farming day program can live in the residential property as well. Absolutely, responded Deb Richards and explained that CLCC does not see it as a requirement that the individual have to work at the farm in order to live there. However, it would provide a lot of opportunities for social interaction and potentially paid employment for some people.

Donna Cohen asked for the people that need 24/7 supervision, who would be their service providers and how would it be funded. Deb Richards responded that CLCC would be the owners of the building and the managers of the property. Individuals who require 24/7 care and potentially are clients of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) would have a service provider, however, CLCC would not be their primary service provider for the 24/7 care; they would have to use their state funds to access a provider of their choice. As far as funding, CLCC is in the process of determining what their selection process is going to be for, who is going to live in the property, and how they assure that the individual have the funding. CLCC will be having discussion with DDS on how the individuals can access those residential service supports that they would need to live there.

Sue Prihar asked Deb Richards if they are looking into aquaponics for a year-round indoor farming. Deb Richards responded that they have someone who is pursuing that option; primarily in the greenhouse to expand their greenhouse operations. Sue Prihar offered to volunteer as she's a teacher and she does aquaponics and have experience in growing microgreens.

Elly Little asked if there is an age limit for individuals to qualify to live in their residential property. Deb Richards responded that CLCC is assuming the individuals with disabilities who will want to move in are over the age of 18 or 22; that they aged out of their school-based services and are looking to establish themselves more independently. However, she does not think they have a need to limit the age of the individuals to qualify.

- Regional Director's Update – Stacie Silva

- Stacie Silva began by encouraging people to tune in to the **4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday forums**. The next one is on individualized employment and day opportunities. These forums are also recorded and posted on the website.
- Stacie addressed some of the concerns from the previous discussion regarding **GTI**, the transition and the challenging aspects of it. She stated that every Region RAC had a discussion about GTI and it was determined that it would be great for each of the regional RAC and the Central Office Council to get together for a special meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup> at 5:30 pm. This will be a virtual meeting with GTI to address some of the questions and concerns that they have.
- **House Bill 501 for Planning and Developing of the Transition Academy**: Stacie Silva explained that DDS is in the process of building and presenting a proposal to legislation for approval. They have been doing site visits in each region to see which site would be most appropriate to develop the transition academy in the North Region. They are looking at Woodbridge in East Hartford, CT. They will be doing a walk through in a couple of weeks to survey the area and see if that's a great location to have the transition academy.
- **Introduce Quality Director – Sheila Schwedler**: Stacie Silva introduced Sheila Schwedler, Director of Quality Assurance. Sheila Schwedler stated that she was a DDS Case Manager for seven years and then became a Case Manager Supervisor. As a Director of Quality Assurance she is continuing to advocate for individuals and is responsible for quality assurance, inspections and other structured audits and help with development and implementation of regional quality improvement plans for different divisions with DDS. Her position has been evolving as time goes on, but by having this oversight, it's going to help ensure that services are provided in accordance with the DDS mission and waiver requirements. But always trying to improve the overall health and safety and quality of services, so that their individuals have the best quality of life.
- **2024 Annual One Voice Conference**: Adrianna Ramirez reported that the Connecticut Family Service Network is having a conference on May 2<sup>nd</sup> of One Voice in North Haven from 9:00 am to 2:00 p.m. She shared the Flyer with the registration link with everyone. This conference is for parents and caregivers of loved ones with special needs to meet and network with other parents. The conference will be presented in English and Spanish.

- **Heather Cowen-Overview of Initiatives:** Heather Cowen introduced herself as the Manager of the North Region Planning and Resource Allocation Team (PRAT). She explained that she has been in the position little under two years. She spent most of her career in the West region as a Case Manager for about 14 years and as a Case Manager Supervisor for about 10 years. The PRAT is a committee that you come to if you need either day or residential funding. Ms. Cowen reviewed the following initiatives that PRAT have this fiscal year:
  - **CCH or Community Companion Home Initiative:** These are licensed family homes for individuals who are interested in residential support, but maybe not as restrictive as a CLA or CRS.
  - **Support of housing initiative:** This is another initiative of which Elba Caraballo will be reviewing later this evening.
  - **Assistive Technology initiative:** this is to increase the individual's independence or safety in their home or family home. An individual or family member interested in assistive technology should discuss with their Case Manager to request an assistive technology assessment and funding.
  - **Day Program and Employment initiative:** If individuals need additional day supports, or employment support, or if they want to explore, secure or maintain employment, they can talk to their Case Manager and come to PRAT to request assistance.
  - **IHS initiative:** DDS was able to fund a few individuals and families that wanted to increase in home support; they were on the DDS database wait list.
  - **Remote support incentive:** this is a remote support for individuals that do not need hands on care or in person supports, but that benefit from a call into FaceTime to assist as needed. An individual or family member interested in learning more about these supports or services should reach out to their Case Manager to determine if a PRAT request would be beneficial.
- **Elba Caraballo-Supportive Housing:**
  - Elba Caraballo, Director of Housing explained that that Supportive Housing combines the suitable safe and affordable housing with individualized support services. Its primary purpose is to provide individuals with supports needed to meet their individual goals and to live independently in the Community. The actual renter, the person responsible for the rent is the individual. Supportive Housing combines rental assistance with support from a qualified provider in an apartment setting. DDS works with the Department of Housing to keep supportive housing affordable and available. The Department of Housing also has a down payment assistance program to help individuals who are going from independent living into their own apartment. All residents of supportive housing must have access to flexible, individualized services for as long as they're needed to achieve and retain the permanent housing. The independent housing residents of supportive housing will also be receiving supports to assist in increasing their life skills and achieving greater choice. Supportive housing settings are mixed income, affordable housing complexes that partner with local DDS qualified service providers to identify units throughout the development for DDS supported individuals identified and supported by the provider agency. There is a working partnership that includes ongoing communication between and among service providers, property owners and property management entities and individuals and their families as needed. DDS goal would be that the qualified provider would carry the responsibility in terms of communicating on behalf of the individuals that they are serving in that location. An individual or family member interested in learning more about supporting housing should contact their Case Manager for more information.

RAC Meeting – 4/17/2024

Meeting Minutes

Page 2

- Legislative Update – no update.
- Open Forum for Public Participation – None
- Meeting was adjourned at 6:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

***Ether Diaz***

Executive Secretary