



**Tompkins County**  
**COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD**

Tompkins County Whole Health  
201 East Green Street  
Ithaca, New York 14850-5421

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**Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee**  
**October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 10:00 a.m. Via Zoom**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Minutes Approved 11.14.2023**

**Present:** Jeffrey Boles, James Beaumont; Sheila McEnergy; Nancy Saltzman; Walaa Maharem-Horan; and Allison Weiner-Heinemann

**Excused:** Sally McConnell-Gist; and Cassidy Stanley

**Unexcused:**

**Guests Present:** Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Candi Saxman, Unity House; Christopher Kiser, Racker; Gabriella Ayers, Catholic Charities; Jamie Kelly, OPWDD; Jennifer Goodman, Mozaic; Michelle Gravel, Springbrook; Jessica Conner, Northeast Pediatrics; Pete Cornell, Catholic Charities; Aaron Brozon, Unity House; and Tricia Tomm, Prime Care

**Staff:** Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; and Karan Palazzo, LGU Administrative Assistant

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The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by James. Sheila motioned to approve September 2023 minutes, seconded by Allison; all were in favor.  
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**Privilege of the Floor:** None

**Announcements/Correspondence:** James shared that the BOCES CSE meets in person on November 17, 2023, at 10:30 a.m. on the TST BOCES campus and encourages providers to attend as topics of discussion will be on transition services and resources for transitioning students. TST BOCES will hold its open house on October 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm with opportunities to speak to family members and those looking for services.

**Discussions**

**Data Collection from Local Providers:** The subcommittee discussed data collection for DD services including waitlists and vacancies with a focus on community hab and day services.

Data collection from providers on Community Hab, Day Hab, and Pre-Vocational services:

1. Number of people on waitlists for services
2. Number of vacancies
3. Total number of openings
4. Total number of positions
5. Total number of people served for day services
6. Staff vacancies
7. How many students are accessing services upon graduation and the availability of the services

- 8. Barriers, trends/patterns, and success stories
- 9. Referral sources
- 10. *Timeline expectation* (Service Amendment Request (SAR) and Notice of Decision (NOD))

Briggs suggested data on how many transitioning students are getting connected.

Harmony said that the Local Services Plan is looking at the impact that the workforce shortage has on the delivery of services and believes waitlist data would be helpful as it links the critical staff shortage with the loss of services. She also believes including a section for agency input on trends and patterns would also be useful.

Jessica suggested advocating and collecting data for crisis intervention from care managers' waitlists for the NY Start Program. Data collection from providers of Residential programs:

OPWDD IRA Closing in November

There was a discussion of respite services in Tompkins County, but more clarity of what respite services are to understand better the support needed to support our community including what residential programs are available. Harmony noted that NY State recently suspended several residential programs in Tompkins County.

Chris, who works in the residential program at Racker is familiar with the challenges Tompkins County faces compared to neighboring counties. He stated that Racker has a free-standing respite program in Cortland County called Steineke Respite House, which is for children, open Fridays – Sundays, and separate from traditional respite services. There is availability.

James noted that OPWDD has identified the temporary suspension of a fourth house in Tompkins County with more suspensions to come. The lack of beds is now causing family members to travel further away to see their loved ones. He noted that 75% of previous staff working at the locations were from Binghamton and were mandated to drive to Ithaca to staff the house. Harmony stated that with the governor's initiative for asylum seekers to get employed, there might be help with the workforce shortage.

James plans to attend next week's county legislature meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> to share his concerns about housing affordability, the decrease of 50 beds, and the shortage of workers due to low wages. He believes the County can do more to address the issues.

Aaron shared that Unity House has two available beds and accepts waivers via an FSS contract.

Jennifer stated that Mozaic is accepting referrals for clinic services including rehabilitation counseling, social work counseling, and psychiatry, and is located inside Challenge on Danby Road. They primarily serve adults but can serve adolescents twelve years and up.

Children and Youth Special Health Care Needs Program– Margo Polikoff, RN, Family, and Community Outreach Worker explained that she works with families from birth to 21 years of age who have any kind of special health care need; including developmental, educational, physical, or behavioral. She helps families identify and access services in the community through referrals to help navigate their particular needs; identifies barriers to access to care; educates the community about what the needs are; and participates in collaborating efforts that engage various community organizations and agencies.

Contact Margo at (607) 274-6645 or email at [Mpolikoff@tompkins-co.org](mailto:Mpolikoff@tompkins-co.org). They will initially speak to an intake coordinator who will direct the call to her.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.



**The next Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee Meeting is  
Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.**