**Maine SILC Minutes**

**May 27, 2020**

**Attendees:**

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|  | **MEMBERS** | **PUBLIC** |
| **In attendance** | Cheryl Peabody (Chair), PWD; Patricia Thorsen, LTCOP; Stephanie Desrochers, Program Coordinator Benefits Services MMC; Darcy Gentle (Vice Chair), AIVR Program Director; Diane Frigon, Regional Director, DBVI; Samantha Fenderson, Assistant Director, DVR; Jessica Cyr, PWD;  | Karen Mason, DHHS/OADS; Lee Glynn; Rick Langley, DRMSTAFF: Rebecca Eliot, Administrative Assistant; Beth Mogan, Executive Director (excused absence) |
|  **Absent** | Tom Newman, Executive Director, Alpha One  |  |

**Welcome and Introductions:**

The Council members introduced themselves.

Joining new today are: Rick Langley of Disability Rights of Maine (DRM) – Joining the council as the representative of the Client Assistance Program (CAP). Rick stated he will be sending out materials clarifying new roles to the Council members shortly.

**Minutes:**

No minutes available.

**Financial Update:**

No report available.

**Old Business:**

State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL): Deadline is still a hard June 30th submission.

Julie and Tom of Alpha One are working on their section. Eric Dibner is working on the section for Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). Cheryl and Beth are working on the SILC section. Each section is diligently coming together by the respective teams. Cheryl and Beth plan to publish to the Council very soon for comments. This plan drives the work the SILC does over the next 3 years: 2021 - 2023

Cheryl shared that she and Beth have reviewed the data from over 85 surveys and have come up with 3 to 4 goals to put into the plan. Goals to consider are capacity building, economic self-sufficiency, work with personal care attendant policies and legislation and lastly to educate and promote around all of those above topics. Cheryl recommends adding a new goal of updating the existing Resource Page on Emergency Preparedness particularly addressing Sheltering in Place supports. Diane, Stephanie and Jess agreed to adding this goal and stressed it is important to figure out the priority resources to list since there is so much information out there already. Cheryl to send the survey data results out to the Council by end of week.

Cheryl presented for consideration the question of changing the Designated State Entity (DSE) for SLIC from Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). She shared they are hoping this change would be in place by end of September 2021. This is proposed in the hopes there may be more funding opportunities thru DHHS. A question was raised on how usual this changing of DSE is for other SILCs. Cheryl responded the actual DSE agency choice is varied state to state. She explained the motivation for the change in DSE is in hopes for more funds for Independent Living services and other support opportunities through DHHS as the DSE in the future. Stephanie remembers this topic was brought up for discussion at a meeting this past Fall 2019 and earlier. She also recalled a survey sent to all the SILCs nationally for an audit of where others had their DSE housed. Samantha shared she recalls this topic of changing the DSE to DHHS and Karen confirmed that the decision at that point was No. Currently, Karen has received the invite for the meeting to discuss this move and it does seem there are enough benefits and a natural fit between CIL and DHHS to explore this collaboration further. Karen and Samantha ill keep everyone on the Council up to date once the meeting has happened and are available to answer any other questions that may arise.

Membership: Still no word from the Governor’s Office on Board and Commissions. Cheryl revealed that she has spoken with Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) Director, Karen Fraser, about this issue. Karen advised her to contact Department of Labor (DOL) Commissioner, Laura Fortman, with a letter outlining a request for help outlining what has been sent and to whom, in regard to getting approval of SILC’s new members’ applications. Then COVID-19 hit. Cheryl will send her letter to the commissioner once things have settled down a bit more and then give an update to the Council.

Monthly Activity Tables: Please submit table for May now. This helps Beth and Cheryl input the information and then tally up for the year-end report. Cheryl shared specifically with Rick and Lee this table is SILC’s way to track what each member has been doing in various areas of activities, hours, who was involved and what was the end result. This information is used in the year-end report to track the SILC’s progress on the SPIL goals.

The conference for National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) will be held virtually this year. The dates are from July 20th to August 7th. Registration and scheduling information has yet to be published. The series of discussions are charged individually for a set amount. This makes the whole conference accessible and affordable to allow many Council members to attend a session or two. Cheryl posed the question of who would like to attend and how many sessions. Cheryl will send the conference information and registration link to Council members to review and respond. Stephanie suggested all to consider using the two hours of the usual Council meeting for July as time spent at some of the discussions. Stephanie shared that with the lower cost many could attend one or two discussions and share the information at the August Council meeting.

**COVID-19 Updates:**

**Diane** from the Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired (DBVI) shared several virtual training conferences are happening. The first is ACE Academy being led by David DeNotaris who is working with transitioning and older individuals. This has a whole curriculum with homework between classes. The 10 students are fully engaged and find the classes very meaningful.

Next is an Independent Living conference beginning in June. This is provided through Mississippi State with the Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC). This is a training for staff with a structured curriculum covering everything from basics to referrals to the interviewing process. This conference has a real focus on independence and assisting people with the services and training to live successfully. Diane is really looking forward to this offering, as well as hearing David DeNotaris speak at the meeting with the State Rehabilitation Council in June. If anyone is interested and wants to join, Diane offered to send out the link.

Other news for DBVI: Teams is continuing to do virtual lessons until given the okay from the state on what safety measures and protocols are needed. The whole agency is discussing how to work with consumers in different ways and how to get staff back into offices safely.

**Trish** from the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program stated that all advocacy services continue. The program worked with DHHS to assist with the I-CART surveys. Staff are anxious to get back to 1:1 visit and are doing the planning needed before going back into the offices safely. The staff having been fielding a lot of calls from family, residents and facilities looking for information and guidelines. There is an upcoming training with Dr. Susan Weary, a geriatric psychologist from UNE, on the topic of Isolation Fatigue. It covers how the facilities can identify and assist people through their pandemic trauma points. It also offers ideas for helping residents to stay engaged and connected with the world. Brenda Gallant wants to get this training out to all the facilities. Brenda has also worked with Maine Health for a public service announcement thanking all direct care workers and distributing signs to put up outside facilities.

**Samantha**for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) shared that services continue and, for the most part, all staff are working remotely. There is discussion and planning for bringing staff back into the office spaces in waves but slowly done. There is a lot of structural changes that need to happen first. DVR will be continuing many of the virtual programs that are now established. Referrals are being made to job agencies and giving what supports needed to those clients still working. The Career Exploration Workshops (CEW) are now done virtually. DVR has a new 14-week program, Job Club, which just finished week 5. This is also offered virtually. DVR plans to continue all existing virtual offerings alongside the in-person workshops once those are safe to resume.

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is changing over to Disability Rights Maine as of the first of June. DRM is holding weekly stakeholder meetings via zoom for people to join and ask questions.

**Karen** from the Office on Aging and Disability Services. (OADS), reports OADS is just doing discussions on how best to bring staff back to the offices safely. OADS wants to ensure they are well prepared and following guidelines. Right now, all staff are still working remotely. Karen shared that most services for OADS are provided through contract provider agencies with whom OADS is continuing weekly conference calls. And for the Aging and community based Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS), OADS is also continuing with the bi-weekly conference calls.

OADS has been collaborating on the I-CART Assessment surveys. The nursing facilities reviews are completed. At this same time, Licensing and Certifications has come out with Emergency Rules that really tightened up what the nursing facilities need to do to keep staff and residents safe. Nursing facilities including those who care for adults with Intellectual Disabilities have continued to see COVID-19 cases grow. This is most likely due to staff who share facilities. Staff are often found to be positive but asymptomatic. Increased testing of staff and patients shows more accurate numbers of positive cases.

OADS has now moved into doing the I-CART Assessment Surveys of congregate living facilities, assisted living facilities and residential care facilities. They have created a guidance document to share with the facilities and stakeholders. OADS will be presenting this guidance document and presentation to some of the facilities’ staff this coming Friday. This document is basically a repackaging of all the information form the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Governor’s links to various information and access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The document also covers information on the basics of safe practices under this pandemic. Basics like making sure to pre-screen staff daily, disinfecting and cleaning protocols, social distancing guidelines, etc. All to help ensure the staff fully understand what the safety measures are now and why these measures need to continue consistently.

The Appendix K document sent to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for modifications to some of the rules has been approved. This information is being disseminated across the state. This means added funds for meals to older individuals. OADS is working with the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to increase the number of meals distributed. Nursing and congregate living facilities have seen an increase in funding to allow reimbursements for PPE and other costs.

**Stephanie**from Maine Medical Center-Benefits Counseling Services: All services by the Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWIC) are continuing through phone calls or video conferencing calls. They will be continuing to work remotely for the long haul at this point. Stephanie shared that since a lot of the benefits counseling services are conducted at various community-based locations to meet with clients, there are challenging times ahead to return to 1:1 in person sessions safely. They must consider agency policies and include the policies of the various locations involved. With all these policies to balance, it will dictate what the agency can actually do into the future. Getting back to the full community-based benefit counseling services is going to be a while yet. The agency is moving slowly about returning staff to office spaces, probably done in waves.

Benefits Counselors are still getting questions on the impacts of stimulus and unemployment payments from clients who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). MMC is continuing to keep their website current with resource links and will be doing another COVID-19 and Benefits webinar in June. Look for the email with that information and link.

**Darcy** of the 121 American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Program shared that staff are staying in contact with consumers through virtual meetings and calls. They have had their monthly Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) conference and are now working on the 6-month report on their 5-year grant. No plans yet on returning to offices or in person 1:1 sessions.

**Rick Langley** from Disability Rights Maine (DRM) mentioned how it is such a crucial balancing of safety issues and civil rights in this world of COVID-19. DRM is getting a lot of calls from people rattled by the long isolation period. It is good to hear about the training on Social Isolation coming up. DRM staff are working remotely and remain available to work with people as best as they can under the circumstances. There have been quite a few conversations about technology and accessibility for clients. Those clients without access or understanding are seeming to be pushed off the radar. Cheryl inquired about older citizens and how they might be missing out on resources they need because of a lack of access to technology. Rick acknowledged that the inventory list of challenges seems to be getting longer. He is attending a meeting Saturday afternoon to discuss those accessibility concerns and ideas of how to make it work for clients.

Karen shared that the Area Agencies on Aging are providing basic training classes for people on computers and using Zoom to stay in contact. The recent federal funding that has come through to the Area Agencies on Aging means they can purchase devices for eligible individuals.

Cheryl asked Samantha to share the rules for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for possibly getting computers to more clients. Samantha responded that the rules haven’t changed for DVR. A purchase of a computer must be determined as necessary and tied to the client’s Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) goals. Of course, now that the world is in this time of pandemic changes and all interaction is via remote video conferencing, the need for easy access to technology has greatly increased. This topic is under a lot of discussion at DVR. DVR works to meet clients at their current ability and comfort levels. Computer technology access really is a short-term need. For clients with no technology available, DVR is staying in contact through longer phone calls and mail.

On the topic of accessibility, Stephanie shared her agency is meeting people at their level. Staff members realize some things may take longer. Staff are making a time investment up front before meetings by calling clients and discussing some basic items first rather than assume everyone has what they need. They are finding this time up front means greater participation and comfort to the clients and the new CWIC trainee. Stephanie shared she hopes some of the positive technology steps continue after the pandemic ends like tele-health visits. Those are a great gain in the changes brought about by the pandemic.

**New Business:** None

**Announcements**:

Stephanie shared several interesting items for Council members to enjoy at their leisure.

First is the movie, “Crip Camp” currently streaming on Netflix. This is about a group of disabled teens who attended camp in upstate New York in the seventies. They then went on to become the leaders in the Disability Rights movement. A great reminder and historical perspective of the disability movement starting in the 1970’s. The second is a new book titled, “Judy Human”.

Lastly is a children’s book titled “All the Way to the Top” by Jennifer Kealin Chapins. This is her story of her journey to the capital hearings for the American with Disabilities Act. (ADA).

Cheryl closed by thanking everyone for attending.

**Adjourned** – Meeting ended at 11:33 a.m.