

Systems of Care
July 15, 2008

In attendance: Jennifer Sellers, Chairman; Heather Vader, UCP of Huntsville, Lynn Stokley, Darla McGerder, Easter Seals; Lee Yount, Glenwood; Myra Jones, ACDD; Tom Holmes, ARC of AL; Susan Ford, DMH/MR; Betsy Prince and Kim Hill, EI System; Tuwanna McGee, ADAP; Catherina DeCola, advocate/parent; and Jennifer Muller, Autism Society of Alabama.

Findings from the Needs Assessment: the group reviewed the pertinent documents.

The committee reviewed last year's issues, including the IACC, a Statewide Coordinator, Regional Centers, and case management. During the first year of the task force, the System subcommittee explored the role of the Center of Excellence in the state and discussed the locations of future regional centers and their relationship with universities. Both the Education and Training subcommittee and the Systems subcommittee looked intensively at Florida's regional centers.

The Center of Excellence is part of Civitan and not Sparks. UAB clearly has autism interests. South AL and UA Tuscaloosa also have an interest in autism. A speaker from the Center of Excellence could clarify the center's purpose. Tom Holmes indicated that Harold Sontheimer is over the Center of Excellence. Auburn was also mentioned as a University that has an autism interest. The committee discussed having representatives from each of the universities present their involvement in the area of autism. That discussion led to a consideration of inviting other programs. The committee decided to wait until it defines the purpose of the regional centers, determines what services they should provide, and explains the role of the case manager. The committee also talked about creating a survey instrument to determine what services are already in existence and who provides them. The Florida regional center model links private service providers. We do have some natural fits right now that include: Auburn and Learning Tree, UAB and Glenwood, South AL and Learning Tree and UA and Brewer Porch.

Another related topic is case management. Case management that spans the lifespan for families who have family members with ASD is non-existent in AL. The committee will continue to discuss and eventually make recommendations regarding the role of a case manager and the role/services of the regional centers.

Committee members voiced concern about the quickly rising number of places that provide services to individuals with autism without a clear set of standards regarding the quality of services and/or the experience training of the provider. The committee would like to establish some standards. The committee is currently determining who would handle this and how. We will continue to discuss this. This could be one of the most important things we could do. Now, the Department of Mental Health certifies programs that are and are not vendors. However, the Department does not recognize autism in its Administrative Code by which it certifies programs and providers; therefore, no certifiable program/provider can serve individuals with autism, and Medicaid and

Insurance do not cover these services. The committee agreed as a whole that it must give parents guidelines for selecting providers. One place to look at is the Alabama Resource Network.

During the first year of the task force, the Systems committee also talked about Workforce Development Training within the two-year colleges. The committee needs to coordinate with the Educational and Training committee and discover if it will address this. A two-year certificate would be very helpful in providing quality services. Currently, mental health and DHR have programs that offer certification; however, most agencies do not. The committee will look at what other states are doing in terms of certification. The committee members agreed that mental health is the best entity for certifying programs at this time. Also, the committee decided that the Collaborating Council needs to include all agencies and that it should work closely with the committee.

What do want the regional centers to do? What do they look like?

The committee began discussing the types/kinds of services that the centers should offer and the number of centers that are needed in the state. It has mentioned four to six and has looked at the universities already working with people with autism. It recognized that Alabama is still considered rural in some places; therefore, to have all of the centers in metropolitan areas would be a mistake. The committee weighed coordinating its regions with the state system of the lead agency (e.g., Mental Health has three centers with teams that include a psychiatrist, a dentist, and a physician.) against creating some skeleton services, since they would entail gradual financing and long-term planning, both of which would benefit the state. The committee is considering creating an autism waiver that would divvy monies specifically for individuals with autism.

The committee must remember the outcomes of families, consumers, and individuals. It wants children diagnosed as soon as possible so that they can receive more service throughout their lifetimes. Many older children, such as Catherine Decola's nephew, lacked beneficial services in their early childhood years. The committee wants individuals with autism to be able to live at home with natural supports, to have another option besides a residential program, but this condition requires many services. The committee hopes to look at the needed services and their funding.

Tuwanna Mcgee passed around the proposed Administrative Code changes. All comments need to be submitted within the next 2 weeks. The changes seek to extend the amount of time the schools have to declare students eligible for school based services.

What does case management look like?

Case management: how would that operate? Alabama has an existing case management system, the 310 Board. 310 Board case management persons can work only with people on the waiver, and mental health does not currently recognize autism as a disability. In Early Intervention every child has a service coordinator so that case management remains independent. At one time the Department did the case management. After reviewing these notes, the committee began to consider how case management should be organized.

By what criteria should a case manager be hired? Could a two-year college program suffice to train future case managers? Jennifer Muller said that the Autism Society would be a source of contact between families and case management, since it currently acts as an Information and Referral program.

Lee, from Glenwood, said that the committee needs to guarantee quality referrals and providers. The committee could refer to the outline of case management in the Administrative Code.

Lastly, the committee agreed that it needs to invite someone from Education, DHR, and Medicaid.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30.