Mill Levy Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
11.14.2019 1:00–3:00PM

Present:  Ann Pierce (Co-chairperson) 
J.J. Tomash (Co-chairperson) 
Kendall Rames 
Lauren Weinstock

Guests:  Michael Kilgore, Financial Health Institute

Absent:  Tim Lomas

Phone:  None

Staff:  Crystal Porter 
Amy Packer

The Council meeting was called to order at 1:05pm by co-chairperson J.J. Tomash at Denver Human Services East, 3815 Steele St, Denver, Colorado.

Introductions & Minutes Review
The meeting opened with a brief welcome, followed by introductions from the Council members and Denver Human Services (DHS) staff. The Council reviewed minutes from the previous meeting held on 10-17-2019. Motion to approve the meeting minutes made by J.J. Tomash and seconded by Kendall Rames. Minutes approved 4-0-0.

Information Sharing and DHS Updates
DHS referenced the detailed update and resulting action items for 2019 recommendations which occurred during the October 17 meeting and provided other substantial updates:

- DHS announced they were close to finalizing contract negotiations for Inclusive Opportunities trainings partners. As soon as finalized, the announcement will be made to the public.
- DHS updated the language for grievance FAQ on DHS website that establishes the Mill Levy Program Manager as a clear contact, from October feedback. Lauren Weinstock suggested a mechanism for providing anonymous feedback. DHS is evaluating opportunities for stakeholder engagement. Written comments can be sent to the mladvisorycouncil@denvergov.org email. Emails could be requested under the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA).
- DHS contacted The Center for START Services to set up a meeting to learn more. Meeting with Dr. Joan Beasley, the Director of The Center for START Services, and Luke Reynard, the Director of Operations, is set for January. Lauren Weinstock requested that Council members be able to sit in on an information session.
- DHS announced Jennifer Beck is no longer with Rocky Mountain Human Services. RMHS will appoint a new delegate for 2020.
- Ann Pierce announced her resignation from the Council effective after the last 2019 meeting.
The Council members reflected on the year and what they wanted to take away from it for next year:

- Members acknowledged the difficulty of the RMHS delegate position, as well as the value feedback provides. Frustrations with the system can be challenging. Council members emphasized the importance of being authentic and honest when providing feedback to DHS. Members wanted to balance constructive criticism with empathy and intended to continue their focus in 2020 on mill levy funded services for people in the Denver community beyond RMHS.

- Council members committed to being thoughtful and respectful in comments while driving conversation forward.

- DHS can continue to develop the RMHS Community Advisory Council (CAC) Member role so issues can be brought to RMHS in that forum.
  - Ann Pierce raised the following for consideration: the push and pull from each end, and navigating personal ties, can be difficult. How objective can a member be if they are a family member or person receiving services?

DHS announced Joe Homlar was no longer with DHS and that he had joined the Colorado Department of Human Services to serve as the Director of the Division of Child Welfare. Mimi Scheuermann assumed supervision of the program in November.

The Council discussed holding fewer meetings and creating space for DHS to develop contracts in the program and bring contractors in to report out. DHS proposed finding consistency in scheduling to help with planning for meetings. Lauren Weinstock mentioned consistency could be helpful for members of the public that want to sit in on the meetings. DHS planned to send out a selection of dates in 2020.

DHS said they were currently working with DHS Marketing and Communications on the application process for new Mill Levy Advisory Council members, including updating the applications offered both in English and Spanish. DHS could meet with individuals that have an intellectual and developmental disability that were interested in being a Council member to help them understand the role.

DHS asked members about how much time they spend volunteering with the Council and their experience. Lauren Weinstock said the initial orientation provided was incredibly helpful. Ann Pierce estimated approximately 2-3 hours a month outside of meeting commitments. DHS proposed four regular meetings to begin with, and then during the year the Council can determine whether they want additional meetings or call in sessions that are open to the public. DHS shared they plan to explore hosting more topic-based forums like the September housing forum, which seemed very successful in gathering feedback. DHS staff expressed interest in working with the Council to investigate technology opportunities and solutions later in 2020, possibly through a forum. One example would be the use of Smart technology in the home to support living independently. The Council expressed desire to revisit technology in 2020, including home tech, safety tech, and medication assistance tech.
DHS does not plan to reactivate subcommittees in 2020. Instead, public meetings would be re- configured to be topic-focused. Members should work together in 2020 to determine a process to build consensus during the meetings.

**CAC Member update**

The CAC Member, Tim Lomas, was not in attendance and no other updates were provided. DHS reminded Council members that the upcoming RMHS CAC meeting occurring next week would be open to the public and Council members could attend or call in.

**Report Outs & Discussion**

Kendall Rames asked for a refresher on what DHS would be working on in the coming months. DHS shared desire to develop bidding opportunities or other internal efforts to address home modifications, mini grants, respite, and information sharing. Ann Pierce asked what the budget would look like in 2020, and when DHS would be appearing in front of City Council again. DHS anticipated appearing in front of City Council in Spring of 2020 with RMHS for their annual report, and DHS would work with City Council to determine when to present an update on the DHS funds. Projections for the funds would be provided next year. J.J. Tomash invited Council members to speak up about any needs they wished to discuss, which could lead to a recommendation to DHS.

**Mental Health.** Kendall Rames opened conversation about mental health, stating that for models like START there was a lot of research and activity involved to evaluate the program. She proposed that, where possible, DHS bring in subject matter experts to speak directly to the Council. Lauren Weinstock also mentioned the benefit of being able to ask questions about the approach and structure for programs, and the feasibility of scaling.

DHS mentioned that programs like the START model may serve a specific subsection of the population. Lauren Weinstock clarified there are many people with I/DD whose health care providers do not ask about their mental health, and it is likely the number of people impacted is greater than the number of people identified. She shared an experience where she, as a parent and caregiver, was asked which diagnosis, I/DD or mental health, was more important to address. Everyone agreed that was completely unacceptable, and wondered how many individuals and parents had been asked to make that choice.

The Council expressed desire to continue exploring other mental health needs and opportunities to ensure services can be provided on a spectrum, for people of a variety of ages, backgrounds, and mental health support needs. Addressing mental health from an early age could have profound impacts for the individual and their quality of life. Council members discussed systemic challenges and inadequacies that make it difficult to support children in school and asked about the potential to bring in additional services. Kendall Rames wondered if the Council could research the need for school-aged children with special education.
DHS highlighted the separation between the City and County of Denver and Denver Public Schools, including different reporting structures. J.J. Tomash proposed the Council consider recommending the commission of a study to compare special education services provided to children in Denver with other communities around the country. Council members acknowledged the importance of this goal. Ann Pierce asked what might be done with the information gathered. She explained that, even if the research is great data, if the Council and DHS were unable to see action as a result of the study the value could be diminished. J.J. Tomash suggested making the information public could help move services forward. DHS suggested the Council consider whether it might be helpful to connect with Denver Public Schools through the Denver ACEConnect team, which primarily serves transitioning teenagers with I/DD, to discuss collaborative opportunities. Kendall Rames emphasized how important it would be to ensure the Council talks to the professionals on the ground— the people who know the kids, care about the kids, work with the kids every day, that are overwhelmed or would need support. DHS asked Council members to explore this topic further before revisiting at a meeting in 2020.

Kendall Rames and J.J. Tomash shared observations of laws not being adhered to in the school environment and discussed that a system existed that should be able to support school-aged children and their developmental and educational needs that was not used effectively. Council members discussed exploring one on one advocates for children with I/DD. DHS mentioned other resources available such as AdvocacyDenver and Parent 2 Parent. Parent 2 Parent had upcoming online classes for Positive Behavior Support. Lauren Weinstock added that trainings were available for parents through the Peak Parent Center for birth to school-aged children.

Ann Pierce reiterated the initial priorities set by the Council, including housing, mental health, and transition services). Lauren Weinstock asked whether the Center for START Services could work with school-aged children and be a beginning of mental health service development in that space. DHS reminded the Council that using a comprehensive model like the START model would begin to address mental health services across systems, and that once there was someone providing services and identifying and evaluating needs in that space, DHS and the Council would learn more about the need and could further identify critical service opportunities. Kendall Rames liked the idea to meet with people across the school system and community members to learn more about what might be working and what might not be working. She emphasized the importance of beginning to work with children while their brains were still developing. DHS encouraged the Council members to investigate this topic and reach out to different stakeholders in the community, including school professionals, families, Disability Law, advocacy agencies, child welfare, and more. Council members agreed that movement on something as a first step, likely START, was crucial. No official recommendations were made to DHS.

**Waitlist.** As discussed earlier in the year, DHS compiled information about Colorado’s Home and Community Based Developmental Disability waiver waitlist, which was one of the top 5 needs identified in the 2018 Needs Assessment. DHS shared that the strategic update the Department for Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF) produces annually about the waitlist was published November 1, 2019. DHS met with HCPF’s Waitlist and Enrollments team on November 6 in order to learn more
about the current process for managing the waitlist, resulting in a document that summarized information gathered. HCPF relies on local CCBs to maintain a master list for persons across the state. DHS proposed inviting HCPF’s Waitlists and Enrollments team to come and meet with the Mill Levy Advisory Council in 2020, and Council members showed enthusiasm for this opportunity.

**Housing.** Lauren Weinstock went to the Squeezed Out workshop held at CU Boulder. It was a one-day community building conference on housing, diversity, and affordability. She also volunteers with a parent group called Parents United for Supported Housing (PUSH) with three other individuals. She reported that of the 24 people in the audience of a recent parent presentation PUSH gave in Castle Rock, 2/3 of the group were over the age of 60 with their children still living at home. One focus of PUSH is person centered planning, including a series on how to do person centered planning. Lauren Weinstock shared a conversation she had about the challenge of people not facing or planning for their own mortality, and how much more essential and complicated this becomes for people caring for children or adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. PUSH also focuses on informing and educating people to help them assess housing comments and co-living as a best practice - this means a bedroom and bathroom for individuals, and then shared spaces for eating, socializing. Senior housing, group homes, and student living are examples of co-living. Inclusion is important, which could mean having diverse people, including people with I/DD, engaged in co-living. Lauren Weinstock reports PUSH has been discussing developing a culture of caring. The group will also educate on the benefits of and promote opportunities for independent living.

She shared the conclusion that housing is not a one size fits all, and a unified solution would not meet every person’s need. DHS wondered whether there was a planning process the mill levy could establish as an addition to other planning programs that exist, such as the mill levy-funded Probate Power with the CCDC. Determining how to connect families to resources remained important. When DHS met with Desiree Kameka, one of the speakers from the September housing forum, she said that returning housing planning to families is a relatively recent shift. DHS wondered whether there is an opportunity to develop a program for housing counseling that could support individuals and families. Kendall Rames proposed the Council consider embedding housing specialists within advocacy organizations as one possible approach. The Council chose to table this issue until 2020 so members could do more research on the need.

**Public Comment**

Michael Kilgore with Financial Health Institute commented that he appreciated the conversation about what school and transition-aged children might need. With this being the only comment, the Council continued discussion of topics from the agenda (see above).

J.J. Tomash motioned to adjourn the meeting. Kendall Rames seconded. Meeting adjourned at 3:08pm.

*Mill Levy Advisory Council sessions are recorded; recordings are available upon request.*