



**Behavioral Health Coordinating Council
Meeting Minutes
May 13, 2020
10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
*Meeting held via WebEx Conference only***

Meeting Called By: Judy Fitzgerald, Chair

Facilitator: Judy Fitzgerald

BHCC Liaison: Tracy Gamble

**Council Members
Teleconferencing:** Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald (DBHDD)
Commissioner Tyrone Oliver (DJJ)
Family Representative, Stanley Jones, Esq.
Disabilities Services Ombudsman Jacquice Stone (ODSO)
Commissioner Michael Nail (DCS)
Commissioner Robyn Crittenden (DHS)
Commissioner Timothy Ward (GDC)
Chairman Terry Barnard (PAP)
Superintendent Richard Woods (DOE)
Parent Representative Diane Reeder

Absent: Senator Renee Unterman (District 45)
Representative Katie Dempsey (District 13)
Commissioner Frank Berry (DCH)
Commissioner Kathleen Toomey (DPH)
Commissioner Mark Butler (DOL)
Commissioner Christopher Nunn (DCA)
Adult Consumer Representative Julie Spores

DBHDD Leadership: Brenda Woodard, General Counsel
David Sofferin, Director, Office of Public Affairs

Agenda

Call to Order: Chair Judy Fitzgerald; 10:08 a.m.

Chair Judy Fitzgerald welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the council members for joining the meeting via teleconference. Fitzgerald said everyone is working toward the same goals and she expressed her appreciation for the partnerships.

Fitzgerald began the meeting with presenting two action items for the council's approval.

Action Items

Approval of the November 13, 2019, BHCC meeting minutes: Chair Judy Fitzgerald asked for a motion to approve. Superintendent Richard Woods made the motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Timothy Ward. The motion was passed unanimously.

Approval of the BHCC 2019 Annual Report: Chair Judy Fitzgerald asked for a motion to approve. Commissioner Michael Nail made the motion, which was seconded by Superintendent Richard Woods. The motion was passed unanimously.

Recovery Presentation

Fitzgerald introduced Toyia Mather, outreach coordinator for the RESPECT Institute of Georgia. Mather presented Erwin Thomas, a graduate of the RESPECT Institute. Thomas started using substances at an early age which led to the loss of her parental rights, homelessness, incarcerations and paranoia. In 2016, Thomas participated in the Start Program and met a Certified Peer Specialist. She learned about the Double Trouble In Recovery Program and became a willing participant. While in the program Thomas learned about dual diagnoses and was linked with a therapist. Thomas put a wellness plan in place and started her road to recovery. She believes recovery is real and within reach.

BHCC Initiatives

Interagency Directors Team

Fitzgerald introduced Danté McKay, JD, MPA, director of DBHDD's Office of Children Young Adults and Families and chair of the Interagency Directors Team (IDT).

McKay provided the council with two updates on IDT and APEX. This is the final year of the 4 year System of Care State (SOC) plan. The new SOC state plan for FY 2021-2023 was delayed due to the pandemic. However, prior to COVID-19, IDT was able to interview stakeholders from 23 agencies and 54 individuals. The team looked at areas of access coordination, workforce development, finance and evaluation. IDT's goal is to have the first draft of the SOC State Plan completed by July 1, 2020 and ready for consideration to the BHCC council. The work of IDT continues with some adjustments and slight delays.

APEX- Federal adjustments have been made to help DBHDD make changes that will allow the continuation of services virtually by use of telemedicine, utilization of web-based platforms and telephonically. In addition, providers are allowed to use verbal consent. IDT's focus is on workforce stability, productivity and financial stability. During this time, family therapy has increased and we continue to provide the services needed. In May 2020, over 6,590 students were served.

Transition-Reentry Committee

Fitzgerald introduced Terri Timberlake, director of DBHDD's Office of Adult Mental Health and co-chair of the BHCC Transition Reentry Committee. Timberlake gave a refresher on the top priorities of the committee.

- Access to RESPECT Institute speakers for partnering agencies- several state agencies have included RESPECT speakers to share their personal story of recovery.
- Forensic Peer Mentor Program Enrollment are in the following facilities.
7 state prisons, 8 day reporting centers, 2 state hospitals and 5 mental health treatment courts. The Recidivism/Re-arrest Readmissions rate is very low.
- Employment for returning citizens- the committee continues to engage, educate and connect individuals and employers about opportunities that can lead to gainful employment. The sub-committee is working to foster collaboration with agencies including Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation and the Georgia Department of Labor to address programming for returning citizens.
- Family Reunification Project is a new initiative multi-session project that is family-focused and peer-facilitated. The pilot site for implementation will be at the Metro Atlanta Reentry Facility/Central State Prison.

Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Fitzgerald asked team members to share a reflection about how COVID-19 has impacted DBHDD while providing services in the community, state hospitals and the crisis service centers around the state. Fitzgerald also mentioned, she along with other commissioners and their respective departments/agencies are tasked with submitting a 14% budget reduction by May 20, 2020.

Doug Reineke, director Office of Legislative Affairs.

The umbrella of uncertainty due to COVID-19 extends to the state capitol as well. Currently, the Georgia State Legislature has been suspended. The house and senate are looking at the second week in June to finish out the last 12 days of the session. The consensus is not a lot of legislation will be moved at this time except for the budget and key legislation. Chairman Katie Dempsey is working closely with Chairman Terry England with the House Appropriations Committees to keep DBHDD and our services a priority. The house and senate understand the importance and vitalness of our services and the vulnerable citizens we serve.

Commissioner Fitzgerald called on Emile Risby, M.D., director of Hospital Services and Chief Medical Officers. Dr. Risby gave an overview about of how the state hospital team positioned themselves to prepare for COVID-19.

The state hospitals continue to operate in the mist of the pandemic. New protocols for quarantine and expansion of the hospitals current isolation practices was created and constantly tweaked. A few employee's and patients tested positive for COVID-19 and we experienced 3 deaths. This led to risk assessments and daily telephone calls with public health, and a suspension of all hospital group activities on and off campus, including visitation. Hospital staff quickly learned the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to help guard the health and safety of employees. Commissioner Fitzgerald was very instrumental with getting Georgia Emergency Management Agency to deliver COVID-19 test to the hospitals. Brenda Woodard, DBHDD's General Counsel was also influential with getting the Georgia National Guard to decontaminate Central State Hospital and West Central State

Hospital to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Other preventions taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19 included; aggressive cleaning, daily mid-shift COVID-19 screenings for employees, and mandatory requirement of employees to wear face masks in patient care areas was implemented.

Commissioner Fitzgerald recognized and extended her appreciation to Governor Brian Kemp, the Department of Community Health, the Department of Public Health, the Center for Disease Control, the Georgia National Guard, Georgia Emergency Management Agency and Georgia Department of Corrections for their assistance.

Monica Johnson, director Division of Behavioral Health gave an overview about how behavioral health support was provided to citizens, providers and partners across the state to help get them through the pandemic and maintaining their mental health wellness. Key activities include the following.

- Stayed informed and connected on the federal level through SAMSHA.
- Collaborated with other commissioners in other states to stay abreast on current information.
- Continued providing services and guidance via telehealth.
- The COVID-19 Emotional Support Line (866-399-8938) was created by Terry Timberlake and in partnership with Beacon and BHL and a host of volunteers. The line has been active since April 6th and has received over 300 calls.
- A series of 2x2 webinars was created for the workforce, health care providers and emergency response workers to share tips about daily self-care. The webinars were offered in April and May with over 2,200 participants.

Housing services during this pandemic has not ceased. Individuals continue to receive housing through the Georgia Voucher Program. Allowances are being made by collaborating with other stake holders and the Housing Task Force to make sure individuals continue to receive the needed service.

Debbie Atkins Director of Crisis Coordination gave a brief overview of how the crisis services. In March, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities sent a memo to the crisis providers to help provide guidance while working through this pandemic. Providers were reminded, they are our safety net and they play a critical role in serving our individuals. The providers participated in a webinar that provided information on protecting their health, safety, and well-being as well as the individuals we serve. The following is a list of new and revised protocols and procedures implemented in the crisis centers.

- Screening protocol – Providers were directed to follow the guidance provided by the Center for Disease Control and Public Health.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Providers learned how to request and wear PPE to protect themselves, patients, and others when providing care. Dr. Emile Risby and his team help create and publish a PPE guide for the crisis providers.
- Report COVID-19 cases- Contact the local Public Health office to report positive cases and to get assistance with testing.
- Modification of units- Older units were not designed for social distancing purposes. Some beds were purposefully made inoperative to limit 3 people in a room.
- Treatment flow - Rotation times for clinical, eating, hygiene, treatment, outside activities, etc., was implemented to establish smaller groups.
- Temporary observation and isolation units were created.
- Assessments were implemented for walk-ins.

- Visitation halted.

A few barriers were nursing shortages, lack of PPE, and the emergency rooms were overwhelmed with patients. Shelter in place has been lifted and the capacity is down by 78 of 509 beds due to the observation room and social distancing.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

There was no further business. Chair Judy Fitzgerald asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion was made by Superintendent Richard Woods and seconded by Commissioner Timothy Ward. The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

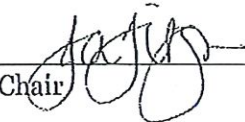
Special Notes

The next scheduled meeting of the Georgia Behavioral Health Coordinating Council will be held on **Wednesday, November 18, 2020.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Tracy Gamble, BHCC Liaison

Signatures:

Chair 

Secretary 

