

**Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities**  
**Meeting Minutes - September 9, 2021**

In attendance: Dawson Robertson, Stephanie Adibe, Michele Henry, Alexandra Berry, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Missie Baxter, Leatrice Fant, Naysha Conway-Hart, Doris Jacobs, Cindy Parr, Erica Lewis, Alyssa Bonser

Katie Collins Ihrke approved the minutes  
Missie Baxter seconded the minutes

Stephanie Adibe shared there is currently an open position for a co-chair. Several applications have been received and sent to group for feedback. Group needs to vote and move forward to the council.

Looking for opinions on virtual vs in person meetings. Naysha shared it is easier to participate in virtual meetings. Doris agreed that it is nice to have the option for both. Katie shared that she likes the option of virtual as well. Group decided to keep the meetings in a virtual format for November 10, 2021

Dawson introduced Alyssa Bonser, DORS supervisor who is the program manager for Region 5 (Howard, Baltimore, Cecil, Harford, Kent County) and physically stationed in Bel Air. DORS has many vacancy issues due to pandemic. There was a hiring freeze so positions were not replaced. They are actively trying to get hiring approved. Howard County only has 2 counselors- Lea Fant and Jackie Myers and still need a support staff position, a supervisor position, two adult counselor positions, and one transitioning youth counselor (Lea's counterpart). There are 4 vacant caseloads in Howard County. Alyssa has pulled 3 counselors in from other parts of the region to assist with new referrals so people are not sitting and waiting for services. Elaine Waters (secretary) has been the point of contact. She has access to all consumers in the system. Still waiting for supervisor position to be offered for hiring purposes. It is a time consuming process. The transition position has been declined for various reasons. DORS is working with personnel on references and hopeful that both positions will be coming on board soon. In terms of services, they are providing in person and virtual services. It is a choice to the consumer and based on what providers are offering. Many consumers prefer virtual so that they can reach more counties. For training programs, it is best to check the DORS website since it is ever changing based on how many students they can take on for each class, and what classes they are able to offer. They are working on bringing students back in person and are moving forward with things. Katie thanked Alyssa for her work. Naysha thanked Alyssa for pulling some of her Harford staff to help Howard County.

Dawson shared that they will hold off on a DORS workshop this fall due to staffing issues. They hope to have DORS join in on the Transition Symposium in the spring. Dawson asked how employment looked in the community. Alyssa said they have had luck getting consumers employed, the job market looks good. The problem is bringing staff on board to assist due to salary.

### **Member Sharing:**

Alexandra Berry shared her recent activities at Athelas Institute

Doris Jacobs shared that they were able to transition back to in person services with the summer co-hort. They placed 10 students in the community over the summer and restarted the work based learning experiences. All of the students did well as it was a very smooth transition. Many mentors wanted to hire their students. Looking to continue with SCC for 9 weeks and are currently accepting referrals for Fall SOS for 8 weeks. Unfortunately, the hospital and HCC will not accept volunteers. Humanim keeps a strong relationship with the hospital to keep that door open down the road. Trying to keep COVID numbers in mind and following local policies. Humanim is currently closed to visitors but are trying to still fit in where they can in the community.

Erica Lewis asked a question about the co-chair applications. Stephanie shared that the applications that were sent out for review did include family members. Transition commission members should review and provide feedback.

Cindy Parr shared: "We have started to return to in-person services and are incrementally returning folks as staffing and transportation will allow. We are like most disabilities providers, having issues with getting staff and acquiring vehicles. We are operating a hybrid model with individuals in the building a couple of days a week and in the community and participating in virtual. We are hopeful that we can get through the fall and winter with no instances of Covid, but we have had a few cases in our residential."

Jermira Sarratt shared that they are offering in-person opportunities for individuals in the office. They had 82 youths participate in the summer program, both virtual and in person. They will provide PPE to individuals who attend in person. Getting ready for fall and spring sessions coming up. Dawson shared that Jermira also participates with the Homewood Transition Fair.

Katie Collins Ihrke shared that her office is hybrid, but are available to meet with people in the office if necessary. They continue to provide advocacy when receiving referrals, mostly virtually but are open to in person. Virtual has been a good thing so there is no problem with transportation. Many of the students are burnt out from being on the computer for so long. Did not get many to participate over the summer in their program, but those that did are staying in touch for other activities. They will be doing a presentation with HCPSS.

Lea Fant is working on getting student referrals through.

Michelle Henry is fielding a lot of issues that have arose. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, Commission on Disabilities will be setting up an event showcasing artwork from the contest held last year. They will be displayed at the counties employment diversity fair.

Missie Baxter shared that HCPSS has returned in person and students are returning to work on September 13<sup>th</sup>. CCE students are going out 3 days a week this year so that there are enough sites to cover students. Project Search is being flexible since the government has not provided any worksites. They are finding other internships for the students. Community Connections and Work Study are also going out in the community for work. A new transition specialist was added to the team- Meredith Gregoire-Cope, who is split between Centennial HS and Marriotts Ridge HS. HCPSS is Being highlighted by MSDE this month by our ability to get students work during the pandemic.

Dawson shared that workshops will continue to be virtual this year as well. The hope is for an in person Transition Symposium in the spring. If this does not occur, we will continue to offer virtual workshops for parents.

Meghan Smallwood is working on planning virtual tours for adult agencies for parents who are exiting this school year.