

Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Thursday, March 13, 2003
Department of Workforce Development
Madison, Wisconsin

MINUTES

Approved 5-8-03 as read

- Council Members:** Sarah Benton, Chair; Twyla Niedfeldt, Vice Chair; John Boyer; Linda Jennison; Helen Rizzi; and Alex Slappey
- BDHH Staff:** Linda Huffer (BDHH Interim Director); Alice Sykora (BDHH Central Office and Council Liaison); and Ron Sanders (Regional Coordinator, Southeastern Region I)
- Visitors:** Kim Bruno, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Linda Russell, Bureau for Community Mental Health Services; Denise Johnson, AODA Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Laura Thomas, Helen Keller National Center, North Central Region; Marcy Dropkin, Department of Public Instruction
- Interpreters:** Mary Lynn Rose; Sandi Peplinski; and Laurie Sanheim
- Real-Time Captioner:** Rosie Coulthart
- Presentation: Tanya Atkinson, Director of the Milwaukee Office of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families**

The focus of this presentation was on policy and policy development, advocacy and lobbying. Some of the themes Tanya heard from the morning's Mental Health Forum were:

- Desire for change
- Communication in the community
- Communication with key players that affect or create change
- Money for improved services, policies, educational system and access
- Systemic approaches for improvement of access to services and accountability

Observations:

- Lack of understanding of the deaf and hard of hearing community with policy makers
- Not having a relationship or networking ability with someone at the high level who may be invested in the changes the Deaf and hard of hearing community wants (e.g. legislators, administrators, other elected officials)

Tips:

- Advocates and advocacy organizations should prepare to give data and policy examples.
- Personal experiences or stories shared have a powerful effect.
- Write a personal thank you note to the policy makers, legislators, and administrators for the opportunity to make yourself heard.

- Volunteer to be on a campaign for a person running for elective office.
- Ask the Sergeant of Arms at the Capitol if deaf or hard of hearing individuals want to meet with legislators or policy makers for communication access services.
- When a group wants to effect policy change:
 - Identify a specific policy issue or problem
 - Lay out a policy strategy and goal
 - Research to identify benchmarks of what are currently in place and what do not exist
 - Ask whether the policy affect a number of significant people?
 - Identify the stakeholders, who you want to target (legislators? the governor? consumers? the list goes on)
 - Mobilize the stakeholders and educate them about the legislation or policy change you want to make and build support up front before meeting with legislators and policy makers
 - Prepare information---usually one page with bullet points to leave with legislators and powers that be
 - Have advocacy training
 - Arrange for a Lobby Day or legislative breakfast (this would require legwork)
 - Sponsors of a legislative initiative or bill usually send it to the other legislators and ask for co-sponsorship
 - Contact the media, which is also an important part of the process and use the media: newspapers—both big city and small community papers; Letters to the Editor; even invite them to the Lobby Day or Legislative Breakfast events (many legislators read the Letters to Editors in newspapers to get a feel of constituents' stances and opinions on issues and use them as their guides for their work)
 - Communicate with legislators, whether it be in person, in letter writing or email. The key is to keep it short and to the point. In the first paragraph, give the legislator your name, state the reason for the letter or contact (about a bill or an issue) and give your support to the legislation. Then in the second paragraph, give your legislator data, statistics and facts. Finally, give a person story--- whether it be yours or that of someone else you know. Conclude the letter with thanks, and offer yourself as a resource for further questions or information.

Background information on the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families:

- a non-profit organization to improve systems for children and families
- functions: policy advocacy, research, publications (e.g. housing, high stakes testing, Wisconsin Kids Count databank; children mental health; racial disparity) maintenance of statistics on poverty, homeless; educational training; advocacy training
- sponsorship of annual educational conferences, e.g., Children Come First

Old/New Business:

- BDHH Report:
 - Interpreter Agencies that provide both signed and spoken language services should be made aware of the Interpreter Licensure Initiative and be educated about the implications of a possible legislative passage of this initiative.
 - A Notice for No Hearing has been posted for the public to respond to the proposed administrative rule changes for the Telecommunications Assistance

Program (TAP). Written or emailed comments are welcome. They are due by April 15.

- Presentations from Regional Coordinators will no longer be a regular staple of Council meetings. Issues, ideas or concerns from them will be addressed to the Council via the BDHH Central Office. Council members are encouraged to contact the Regional Coordinators in their respective regions for activities and presentations in the regions. Council members from this type of interactions can bring back issues or concerns to the Council for further action or discussion.
- Helene Nelson is the new Secretary of the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS). She will attend a Council meeting in the near future and meet with members.
- Alice will make it a routine to send Council members correspondences, when appropriate, that the Council sends out.
- Linda Huffer gave an update about the budget status of BDHH and DHFS:
 - The Governor has required all state agencies to downsize. DHFS Central Office had to come up with 100 positions to give up. Each division had to look at their bureaus and try to figure out an equitable way to meet the requirement. There have been and will be merging of bureaus within DHFS. BDHH will be within the new Division of Disability and Elder Services, and Sinikka McCabe has been appointed the Division Administrator. Judith Frye will be one of the three Associate Administrators, and whom BDHH will report to.
 - In the process of downsizing and position elimination, BDHH will relinquish one Regional Coordinator position by June 2004. It is a position in one the Southeastern Regions. Details on the logistics of these regions are being worked on.
 - Also affecting BDHH is the DVR contract. DVR wants to change its contract to a fee-for-service structure, providing individualized services to DVR consumers. beginning July 1, 2003. This is opposite of what BDHH has been doing, which is providing system-wide services to employers, employment agencies and other vendors that DVR partners with. BDHH is concerned because it has only so few Regional Coordinators, all of who serve so many counties or in heavily populated counties, that the individualized services would burden the staff and take them away from truly essential services in other systems.
 - Services will continue, but not in the same financial capacity as in the past.
 - The BDHH Director position remains unchanged. Linda Huffer is still on special assignment.