

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
FEBRUARY 25, 2008  
MINUTES**

**Location:** First Floor Conference Room  
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA

**Members Present:** Jeff Parker, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Co-chair, Aurelia Carter, Janet Evans, Sarah Goldstein, Rich McGann, James C. Noschese, Paul O'Hanlon, John Tague,

**Members Absent:** Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson,

**Others Present:** Ida Bormentar, Victoria Campbell, Holly Dick, Kendra Jenkins, Dianne Gallagher, Carolyn Hess, Carol Horowitz, Chuck Keenan, Richard Meritzer, Teresa Nellans, Bill Newlin, Georgette Powell, Tamara Siegert, Robin Smith, Sally Jo Snyder, Joe Wassermann

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Parker at 1:10 PM.

**Introductions:**

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. Parker read the agenda and explained there would be two separate presentations by Paul O'Hanlon for WE COUNT and MAYVIEW. Also, he noted the Staff Update was moved up on the agenda because of a time conflict for the interns.

**Approval of the September and November 2007 Minutes:**

A motion was made by Mr. McGann and seconded by Dr. Seelman TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED. The motion was passed unanimously.

**Financial Report:**

There has been \$175 spent on fiscal management and \$400 spent on cart expenses. Between October and January, approximately \$1600 has been spent on interpreters. There is \$6,875 left for the next five months. Approximately \$1,100 on average is spent per month. Dr. Seelman moved TO ACCEPT THE FINANCIAL REPORT. The motion was seconded by Aurelia Carter. The motion passed unanimously.

## **WE COUNT CAMPAIGN**

Paul O'Hanlon explained the We Count Program. It is a project under the Disability Voting project. Mr. O'Hanlon explained that all state-funded disability organizations are required to assist in voter registration, as stated under the National Voter Registration Act (known as Motor Voter) approved in 1993. There are 49 Counties, including Allegheny County, that have reported zero registrations from the disability community. Pennsylvania has reported 1,070 in total. Allegheny County has 200,000 people with disabilities, but the county reported zero registration. The purpose of this campaign, according to Mr. O'Hanlon, is to draw attention to this issue. There needs to be a better job done about registration.

On March 5, 2008 from 3-5p.m. at United Cerebral Palsy there will be a program designed for providers of services to persons with disabilities looking at legal compliance and models around the country in hopes to make this program more efficient. It helps to see what is working and what is not.

Mr. Parker asked about the reporting process. Who and where do people report these facts. Mr. O'Hanlon responded the Pennsylvania Department of State is responsible and the contacts are under them. The county's contact is Regina Genhoff. Then it goes to county elections, which could be the potential source of the problem. There are boxes on the back of the registration form but they are not labeled. One of them is for disability related agencies, but that is never explained to the agencies.

Mr. Parker asked what the Task Force could do to help in this campaign. Mr. O'Hanlon said the best way to aid in this is to publicize the March event. In terms of long term participation, there is an enormous amount of education needed. There is confusion as to what they can do. Most of these agencies are 501c3 and are told they can not do partisan political activity. However, this activity is non-partisan and most agencies are confused about the reporting process. It is a disservice to the disability community to have it appear that they are not registering.

Ms. Evans raised the point that nowhere on the registration card is there a place to check if someone is disabled or not. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed and confirmed there was no mention of that. If you need assistance in voting they do register that. Unfortunately, that is not high on the priority list of things that needs to be addressed. Ms. Evans also mentioned there are still some places that are trying to help in voter registration, like the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living that always asks if she is registered to vote. She asked if she should reregister. Mr. O'Hanlon said no, but you should change your registration if you are not registered at you current address. If you reregister they will just reject the registration. We have twice as many rejections as any other state. He reiterated the law is broad; any agency that provides services to the disability community is designated as a voter registration agency but nobody is paying attention to that.

Mr. McGann raised a comment about how there is no Braille for the deafblind community. Mr. McGann shared a story about how his sister accompanied him to a voting station, but she does not know how to sign. There is a desperate need for interpreters to be present to help those who need it.

Mr. Wassermann said he will have Radio Information Services get out the information. Mr. Parker added we can send a notice out through the Task Force email list. He asked if we want to do any follow-up through the County. Mr. O'Hanlon said they are still investigating where the breakdown is. It could be the agencies are not checking the right box or it could be that the County is not recording the information. Pennsylvania has a closed primary. You must be in a party to vote. If you are registered as an independent, you can reregister in a party.

Mr. O'Hanlon went on to address Mr. McGann's concerns. With the current machines, not everyone can vote independently. Congress said not every disability can be served with existing technology. The machines require dexterity to use. Whether interpreters need to be at the polling places is an open question. He will look into that. Mr. Noschese suggested that they have one polling place that services the deafblind community. Mr. O'Hanlon responded the Department of State has rejected that idea. You must go to the polling place where you live because many ballots are unique. Mr. Noschese countered that we have wonderful technology. We can pull up a bank account from anywhere. A voting number can identify what ballot should be used. Mr. O'Hanlon agreed we could do more. We have gaps between what is possible and what the state can do. In Pennsylvania, 18% of the polling places are still inaccessible. They have made suggestions to the state for alternatives, but these have been rejected.

Dr. Seelman asked if accessible voting includes interpreters. Mr. O'Hanlon said no, it only includes physical barriers. There is nothing on the State check list about this. The Federal manual has secondary requirements. Everyone should join the disability voting system. Dr. Seelman agreed that everyone has the option to get involved in organizations. Their energy will be better there. Mr. O'Hanlon added we need to have a voice in voting. The We Count campaign is focused on what is doable. Accessible voting machines and polling places are longer range battles. We must work together. Mr. Parker said the Task Force will support the We Count program.

## **MAYVIEW**

Mr. O'Hanlon talked about the prospect of Mayview being turned from a mental health treatment facility to a community based facility. He also touched on the issue of how to go about doing such a transformation and how to balance the two. Mr. O'Hanlon mentioned that there are decisions already being made to do the transformation to community based but added that there is a need to report on the project. Mr. O'Hanlon mentioned several key questions, such as: How is the project going?; What are the issues?; What is not going well?. He continued by indicating that hopefully a planning session on the topic is ahead and all could be invited to expand on the issue. Dr. Seelman questioned how the project is being tracked? Mr. O'Hanlon replied that one of the things he will be interested in is the feedback from the community.

Mr. O'Hanlon clarified what he meant by community - which community? Mr. O'Hanlon explained that instead of having a mental health treatment facility, Mayview could be transformed to a community based facility. Ms. Goldstein stated that she worked for the Governor's committee and received tons of complaints and continued that a friend of hers said that Mayview does not have a good support system. She shared her concern that some of the problems could stem from the fact that people are not supported enough and feels that the support system is important. Ms. Carter mentioned that Pat Valentine could be a good person to contact in terms of hearing about success stories of people who leave Mayview. Mr. Tague stated that the Consumer Health Coalition will get involved in this project because they are doing a lot of related work on the issue. Mr. Parker mentioned that Mr. Meacham, Director of the Housing Authority will be coming to next month's meeting and wanted to know if this would be a good time to invite Pat Valentine as well. The members decided yes. Ms. Carter will invite Pat Valentine. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that 2-3 people get together to strategically pick whom to invite. Dr. Seelman said we may need to give it more time and get a boarder group of speakers – representatives form government, consumer organizations and consumers themselves. Ms. Carter stated that it is important to keep the community involved in this issue and to also keep the discussion on the issue. Mr. Parker asked Ms. Carter, Mr. Tague, Mr. O'Hanlon and Ms. Goldstein to be the group to keep us updated on the Mayview issue.

## **STAFF UPDATES**

Kendra Jenkins, the ADA Compliance Intern, spoke on her work with Special Events Permit and the hospital compliance Initiative. In regards to the Event permits, there are many activities quickly approaching in the upcoming months in the city. Working on behalf of ADA, Ms. Jenkins has the responsibility of contacting all the coordinators and making sure the events are compliant and accessible for all. Ms. Jenkins expressed how happy she was that people were receptive and eager to accept suggestions about compliance. People are beginning to realize and make adjustments for the needs of everyone.

Ms. Jenkins explained the work she has done with the hospital compliance initiative. It was slow getting off the ground, but movement is being made to enact some changes. Emails have gone out and contacts have been made in an effort to set up a formal meeting with hospital administrators, people representing the deaf and hard of hearing community, EMS representatives, the Consumer Health Coalition representative Sally Jo Snyder, and the Task Force to cohesively come together and talk about their issues in a forum. The purpose of this initiative is to bring forth the issues regarding effectiveness and efficiency during situations like emergencies and hospital visits. Ms. Jenkins made herself available to any questions, comments and concerns regarding this issue.

Ida Bormentar, the Grants Intern spoke of her work. She mentioned that she's been working with Mr. Parker in securing funding for the Greenfield and Brookline community centers to make sure that their bathrooms are ADA compliant. She stated that currently she is working on a grant proposal to repair the sidewalk on Fifth and Forbes Avenue near the Birmingham Bridge. She is co-sponsoring with Bike Pittsburgh Inc. to request funding from organizations such as bike belong. She's also waiting to hear from Sara Walfoort, who she will be collaborating with to request funding for bicycle signage around the city. Lastly, she has been looking for funding for the Greenfield Community Center ramp.

Mr. Meritzer talked about the ADA coordinator job. The position will close on Friday February 29<sup>th</sup>. Then the Director will set up a committee to interview and select someone. Ms. Carter moved the TASK FORCE HAVE A REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COMMITTEE. Seconded by Ms. Evans. The motion passed. Mr. Parker said he would draft a letter.

## **TASK FORCE UPDATE**

### *Retreat Planning*

Mr. Parker mentioned possibly having a retreat on a Saturday and that 2/3's of the committee expressed interest. Ms. Seelman and Mr. Tague moved to HAVE THE SATURDAY RETREAT. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Parker asked for volunteers for the retreat. Mr. O'Hanlon, Ms. Goldstein, Ms. Carter and Ms. Evans agreed to help out with planning the retreat.

### *Still Small Differences*

Mr. Parker reported there was a reunion of the original cast, family members and people involved in the filming and production of the Small Differences film. The reunion was the kickoff for the filming of the sequel "Still Small Differences".

### *Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank*

Ms. Evans talked about the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank open house. She stated that the event was good, two others besides herself from the disability community attended and representatives from UPMC were there. They showed the film she was in. Questions still remain on what approach to take to get food to people with disabilities, especially getting food to troubled neighborhoods like Hazelwood. Ms. Evans ended by stating that next time she will come with more information. She added if you move into an area you can apply for food with the Salvation Army.

Mr. Parker asked if there was more outreach planned. Ms. Powell of the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank elaborated more on the program and appreciated the fact that people came out. She stated

that she had been reaching out to the community and trying to establish training for staff and others. Mr. Wassermann suggested she speak to someone about an interview on Radio Information Service. Ms. Powell responded she was interviewed last week. She is getting information printed in Braille. Ms. Evans ended by repeating the theme of the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank: End hunger by 2015.

### **INFORMATION SHARING/ VOX POP**

Victoria Campbell reported that the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living (TRCIL) had a transportation forum that was quite successful. It opened the lines of communication. DARE will also meet them. They hope to hold this type of forum quarterly. On April 29 & 30 from 12:30 PM until 6:30 PM, the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living presents its 2008 Fair Housing and Independent Living Festival at 900 Rebecca Street in Wilksburg, PA. This event will give people the opportunity to know about fair affordable and accessible housing, landlord and tenant rights, ADA reasonable accommodations and modifications, fair housing law, assistive technology, supportive services, home mods, attendant care, accessibility, utility assistance, applying for housing, resources to help you live on your own, social security and DPW, and employment assistance. Arnelle will be at the meeting next month.

On March 14, 2008 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am The Consumer Health Coalition will be having a Legislative breakfast at the Three Rivers Center for Independent Living at 900 Rebecca Ave. in Wilksburg PA. They asked that everyone RSVP by March 7<sup>th</sup> due to limited seating. Mr. O'Hanlon will be speaking at this event. Mr. McGann asked how many legislators were coming. Ms. Campbell said 32 elected officials, both state and Federal, were invited.

Ms. Evans reported the Committee for Accessible Transportation (CAT) is meeting March 6<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Meetings are open and accessible. Representatives from Port Authority and Access will be there.

Ms. Nellans said that she supports more accessibility at hospitals, but they need to be taught the difference between deaf and having hearing loss. They should only offer assistance when it is wanted. Mr. Noschese added that these different groups have different needs. And nobody should use the term "mute". We are either deaf or hard of hearing.

Diane Gallagher reported there is a group working on accommodation cards. You will be able to develop the card on line, print it out and put it in your wallet. Carol Horowitz is working on this from Disability Rights. She further pointed out that there is never an emergency that an interpreter can't cover. They are meeting with the AMA to take care of the problem with private doctors. Ms. Powell asked how it is possible that a deaf person could not have interpreting services covered. Mr. Parker said that this was an important and lengthy issue of its own that we should probably postpone to a future meeting because we had reached our time for adjournment.

Ms. Seelman moved the meeting to be adjourned. Ms. Evans seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00PM

#### **THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:**

DATE: March 17, 2008  
 TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
 LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
 200 Ross Street  
 Pittsburgh, PA 15219