

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
NOVEMBER 21, 2011  
MINUTES**

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

**Members Present:** Aurelia Carter-Scott, Janet Evans, Sarah Goldstein, Milton Henderson, Richard McGann, Richard Meritzer, James C. Noschese, Paul O'Hanlon Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, John Tague, Joe Wasserman

**Members Absent:** Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Jeff Parker

**Others Present:** Shirley Abriola, Lester Bennett, Adolphine Birescik, Jack Dougherty, Steve Everhart, Evan Gross, Monica Jones, Jessica Kalkhof, Chuck Keenan, Rob Kohlmeyer, Emily Krobot, Georgianne Langenfeller, Charles Morrison, Eileen Nobb, Lucy Spruill, Andrea Tuccillo, Ryan Uhrig, Kitty Vagley

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Hanlon at 1:00 PM.

**ACTION ITEMS**

**Review and approval of September minutes**

Mr. Noschese wanted to point out that his name had been misspelled in the minutes. Mr. McGann makes a motion to approve the minutes seconded by Dr. Seelman, other task force members approve.

**Review and approval of financial report**

Mr. Tague stated that the financial report is not showing the expenses for CART from September or October because he has yet to receive the bill from Deaf and Hard of Hearing services. Mr. Tague added that two meetings will still most likely need to be canceled and they had discussed those meetings being the February and December meetings. Dr. Seelman made a motion to cancel the meetings in February and December which was seconded by Mr. Wasserman. Mr. O'Hanlon moved for a vote which all members said aye, no opposed, and no abstentions. Ms. Evans added that they also

needed to schedule an annual meeting to which Mr. O'Hanlon replied they could do that at a later time.

### **DISCUSSION – Andrea Tuccillo State Housing Waiver Limitations**

Ms. Tuccillo represents a group of parents from the North Hills of children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities that are in their twenties. Ms. Tuccillo stated the parents came together because their children have been interested in moving out of their parent's homes and into a place of their own. Ms. Tuccillo stated that the group's goal is to help facilitate this. Ms. Tuccillo stated that the group was explained that in Pennsylvania there are two waiver systems that serve this population; the Person Family Directed waiver and the consolidated waiver. Ms. Tuccillo continued that all the individuals qualify for the Person Family Directed waiver but will not receive the consolidated waiver because there is no money for it. Ms. Tuccillo added that the group's mission statement is to provide a safe living environment for adults with disabilities living as independently as possible may experience full enriching lives guided by choices and supported through the coordination of public and private resources. Ms. Tuccillo added that the group is committed to creating a safe living environment outside of the home, funding that provides appropriate support driven by indentifying individual needs while maintaining fiscal efficiency to control cost, working with an agency that matches their values and openly communicates, a location in the North Hills that is as accessible as possible, and incorporates ongoing internal communication for continuous quality improvement and contingencies. Ms. Tuccillo continued that the group has made a commitment plan and divided up into smaller groups to focus on several tasks; identify different supports, educate themselves, research funding options, consult with professionals to look at laws and mandates, identify agencies that meet their values, explore existing programs, look at different types of housing models to fulfill the needs and wants that their young adults had expressed to them, looked at different agency partners, became advocates and met with different people, and ongoing coordination to hold regular meetings. Ms. Tuccillo added that once they had completed this and started into their mission they became better educated and frustrated by problems in the current housing system. Ms. Tuccillo stated that these frustrations have arisen from problems in the expense of the current housing system, service definitions in the waiver programs, and huge variances in funding. Ms. Tuccillo continued by reading letters from the group to Secretary of Public Welfare Alexander, one from Ms. Tuccillo herself and one from her co-chair Terry Richardson.

Ms. Tuccillo first read the letter from Ms. Richardson, "I am a parent of a son with down syndrome who is 26 years old. He currently works at two jobs, these are competitive jobs in the community, and receive funding through the PFD waiver. One year ago a group of parents from the North Hills of Pittsburgh started meeting informally to discuss how to help our children with disabilities fulfill their desire to live as independently as possible with their peers in the community. In this process we realized we would need to have goals, commitments, and use a mission statement." Ms. Tuccillo stated that in this part of the letter Ms. Richardson describes what Ms. Tuccillo had informed the Task Force of earlier, she then continued reading, "After we developed the above plan we formed

committees to do research on housing and support options, the following list is agencies we have spoken with in Allegheny County; Allegheny County, Blue Roof Technology, Presbyterian Senior Care, Action Housing, Western Psych, Mainstay, Achieva, MASPA Connecting Communities, UPMC, Carnegie Mellon, Residential Resources, and A Advantage. After meeting with the above agencies and trying to develop one comprehensive housing plan that includes the housing and the support that is required for this to be successful we have come to the realization that the housing dream that our children have is only that, a dream. The current waiver system has developed into an unequal and unfair distribution of government services; housing support is only available through the consolidated waiver. Adults with disabilities that are in their twenties with moderate intellectual disabilities are not receiving the same level of service as those adults that are older with the same diagnosis and ability. With the current consolidated waiver average being one hundred thousand and the waiting list being in the thousands the consolidated waiver is virtually non-existent. The system is broken the state of the current CMS system does not support the ODP mission statement to provide individuals with mental retardation, autism, and their families the services and supports they need and the opportunity to make real choices about living, working, and options for social activities to enable them to live in and participate fully in the life of their communities. Instead their options and choices are severely limited. In many cases living at home with mom and dad well into adulthood is both socially limiting and emotionally unhealthy for both parent and child, it is unacceptable. Our kids have worked, paid taxes, and volunteered in their communities, they deserve and want better. Not following the OPD mission statement is detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable population.” Ms. Tuccillo stated that they had requested a meeting with Mr. Alexander.

Ms. Tuccillo continued by reading her letter to Mr. Alexander, “I am writing to you on behalf of my 25 year old son Andrew who has down syndrome, works at the local YMCA, is a fiercely competitive swimmer, and a huge hockey fan. Everyone agrees there is a need for change, with runaway costs in the Medicaid waiver program there are still waiting lists in the thousands. There are consumers, tax payers, and politicians that are unhappy and frustrated with the current system. Everyone is looking for better, cheaper, more efficient ways to deliver services. Currently policy, standards, and programs are based on legislative direction that resulted from the American’s with Disabilities Act and Olmstead Decision with an emphasis on deinstitutionalizing the disabled population and integrating them into their communities. These were important steps forward in supporting the constitutionally given rights of the disabled. However, in the rush to deinstitutionalize too many individuals were placed into one or two person group homes. What developed over the last fifteen years was a financially unsustainable model of small group homes with intensive individual oversight. What might have been appropriate for some was not necessary for others. The legislation addressed the need to bring a population that spent their days in workshop type settings into the community. In line with the push to deinstitutionalize waiver service definitions and HUD 811 regulations were written to restrict the number of disabled people living and receiving services under one roof. These were good decisions at the time they were made, but financially unsustainable in the long run. At the same time that housing was being deinstitutionalized, education was also being reformed. Idea not only brought inclusive

education models it also new and better teaching methods and preparation for disabled individuals to transition into their communities after graduation. We now see individuals that would have previously transitioned into a day program, out working in the community. Thanks to education reform their functional and social skills are higher than the previous generation. Their expectations are also higher; they expect to be able to move out of mom and dad's home and into a place of their own. This generation does not need the intense support of a group home, but they still need some level of financial and supervisory support to live on their own. It is time to develop a new housing vision, a cheaper more sustainable more appropriate long term housing vision. I work with parents in the North Hills area of Pittsburgh, I can immediately point to twenty individuals in their twenties with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities who work in their communities and participate in community activities. They would like to live together in a larger group setting with eight to ten individuals, having their own space but sharing a common area for communal meal and socializing. I can envision a green building to minimize the ongoing utility cost and use of technology for safety and security checks thus providing a safe environment while scaling back personel costs from 168 hours per week per individual to 35 hours per week per group. These are individuals who get plenty of community action through their jobs and social activities and who would choose to live together. Think lifestyle choice of a golf community or senior assisted living. It is a model that fills the gap between the \$26,000 non-housing PFD waiver and the unlimited \$100k average and practically inaccessible consolidated waiver. If regulations can be changed or a new initiative can be found it is a model that achieves the economy of scale while still providing a large level of supervised independence. There is a growing uneasiness in the community of families that champion the use of inclusive education initiative, they are anxious for the members of their family to move on to their next developmental stage and are disappointed with the lack of support they are receiving.”

Ms. Tuccillo stated that they met recently with Kevin Freel, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Developmental Programs, and conveyed to him that they wanted a more proactive system than a reactive system to provide a smooth transition out of the parents' home. Ms. Tuccillo continued that they want a multi-tiered waiver system that is being implemented in other states with various caps to control costs. Ms. Tuccillo added that they would like deregulation to allow pooling of funds, some of the people from their group do not use all of the funds from their waiver money and if they were living together they would not be allowed to share or pool those funds. Ms. Tuccillo stated that they want deregulation to allow more of a campus setting and allows supplemental funding without loss of benefits. Ms. Tuccillo added that they want to pool knowledge about how to coordinate funding streams for both housing and support. Ms. Tuccillo continued that service definitions need to be reviewed to meet needs logically and economically. Ms. Tuccillo also stated that Mr. Keenan recommended that she come to this meeting to raise awareness about their group and what they are trying to do.

Mr. Noschese stated that they have the same kind of issues with the deaf and deaf-blind community and there is a group called LHO and they are dealing with the same situations and it has been a struggle. Ms. Carter-Scott inquired if they had connected with other

family groups with the same issues in the area. Ms. Tuccillo responded by saying that it is an enormous issue and they have been reaching out to other groups. Ms. Carter-Scott added that there are other family groups that she can get Ms. Tuccillo in contact with that have young adults that are in the same situation of wanting to move out of their parents houses. Mr. McGann inquired whether Act 150 could potentially be applicable to their issue, to which Ms. Spruill stated they would not be eligible. Ms. Evans stated that UCP had three residential models and wanted to know if they have met with them about this issue. Ms. Tuccillo stated that someone from their group had met with UCP. Dr. Seelman added that United Way also has a transitioning project for people in similar situations and also that Mr. Keenan could be a good resource for their group. Ms. Spruill added that most of the waivers right now are frozen or have been suspended. Ms. Spruill continued that there are ways to create limited trust funds that do not count against their waiver eligibility or benefits and suggested that there are attorneys that know how to do that and the Developmental Disability Council may have information on that. Ms. Tuccillo replied that there are some families in the group that could be involved in such a fund but some of the families could not afford to support such a fund but she will look into the trust set up. Mr. O'Hanlon inquired whether if the housing model they are using is conflicting with typical housing norms, and he wonders if the campus housing model is working against their goals and if Ms. Tuccillo had heard any feedback to that effect. Ms. Tuccillo stated that they have had that response and that the model has been discouraged by the HUD funding. Mr. O'Hanlon added that every five years the housing authorities are supposed to assess the needs of the community and design programs to address the unmet housing needs, and if Ms. Tuccillo's group has any meetings with any of those entities. Ms. Tuccillo replied that they had not. Ms. Goldstein added that they should have their children be involved in the group. Ms. Tuccillo responded that she agrees but all of the children work in competitive workplaces and a lot of the time cannot attend meetings. Mr. Tague inquired about what came of the meeting from Mr. Freel, to which Ms. Tuccillo responded that Mr. Freel admitted to being new to these issues and wanted to meet with someone closer and more knowledgeable about these issues which led to the conference call with Ms. McCool who works under Mr. Freel at ODP who administers the funding to programs for ODP. Ms. Spruill added that they might want to seek out a demonstration grant and consultants could help them in attaining this grant. Mr. O'Hanlon stated that due to the time constraints of the Task Force meetings that a sub-committee could be set up to work on this issue and inquired about who would want to be part of that and he could coordinate; Mr. Keenan, Ms. Spruill, Ms. Carter-Scott, and Ms. Evans all volunteered for the committee.

## **UPDATE**

### **Snow Angels Program**

Mr. Dougherty stated that he is at the meeting to provide an update on the Snow Angels Initiative and the program is designed to assist elderly and people from the disability community by matching volunteers to those in need in their own neighborhoods to shovel their sidewalks and walkways to their homes during the winter. Mr. Dougherty added that volunteers will be supplied with a 12lb jug of melting salt, a brightly colored vest, and if needed a snow shovel. Mr. Dougherty continued stating that they have obtained

partners in the program; Mount Ararat Community Center has signed on to service 30 homes, a couple of AmeriCorps programs, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council 10 volunteers, Keys Service Corps 30 volunteers, and added that they are still reaching out to other community organizations. Mr. Dougherty added that the program will launch either today or tomorrow and that they are already accepting applications online for both volunteer and recipient. Mr. Dougherty added that he will send around all the information pertaining to the program. Mr. Dougherty then inquired if the task force would be able to reach out to potential recipients as well as potential volunteer organizations in the North-West and South sections of the city.

Ms. Spruill stated that the links to the waiver form for volunteers and recipients both go to the volunteer form, but she wanted to thank the city for this program. Ms. Carter-Scott wanted to know how the program would be continued to be marketed to people without access to a computer and how they can get a paper copy of the application. Mr. Dougherty stated that they would be doing mailings to senior centers as well as all community meetings and community newsletters, also that recipients can apply through the Mayor's 311 hotline. Ms. Carter-Scott also wanted to add that Pittsburgh Public Schools could be a great resource for volunteers, Mr. Dougherty agreed and stated they have not reached out to them as of yet. Ms. Evans stated that public TV and local news could be run stories to raise awareness on the program. Ms. Spruill inquired about if visual impairments would also qualify as a physical disability. Mr. Dougherty replied that there are no restrictions as to what is and is not a disability on the application. Mr. O'Hanlon inquired if a Facebook page had been made for the project to inform mostly potential volunteers of the project. Mr. Dougherty stated that the Mayor has his own Facebook page and that they are not permitted, as members of the Mayor's office, to create additional Facebook pages but they could provide information for someone outside of the Mayor's office to create a Facebook page for the program. Mr. Bennett inquired about future plans for the program and if it is planned to go on for a number of years. Mr. Dougherty replied that there is no set plan for the program, but that it would in all likelihood go on for at least a few years to determine the project's success. Mr. O'Hanlon inquired about what the Mayor's office stance on the enforcement of the snow removal code with the implementation of the Snow Angels program. Mr. Dougherty replied that the enforcement of the code is up to Public Works and that he would have to check and get back to the Task Force about this coming winter's enforcement of the snow removal code. Mr. McGann wanted to ask Mr. Noschese if he has any information regarding how someone without a computer could access the application or 311 line, Mr. Noschese replied that he knows 311 is not working but (412)255-2621 is a number that works and you can access the information through that number. Mr. Meritzer wanted to inform that they city has money to make messages accessible to everyone in the city and that any information coming from the Mayor's office about this issue could be interpreted and captioned and that he would do whatever he can to help. Dr. Seelman added that the Bridges website could also be a good resource for how to make messages such as this accessible; the website both captions and interprets. Ms. Spruill added that getting information about the project to ACCESS transportation could get them a lot of potential recipients for the project. Ms. Carter-Scott added that a volunteer group Who's Your Brother ([whosyourbrother.com](http://whosyourbrother.com)) is another group that the city may partner with for

volunteers. Mr. O'Hanlon inquired if they had reached out to council members about finding volunteers and recipients in their areas, to which Mr. Dougherty informed that as of now they have not.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

Mr. Meritzer stated that Disability Mentoring Day was a success in the City with 18 students working in 6 departments, including City Council. Mr. Meritzer continued that two of the schools involved want to continue working with the City on projects. Mr. Meritzer stated that he had a webinar for Zoom-Text, a technology that is to improve computer accessibility with the visually impaired, but for the most part all aspects of the program are already available on computers. Mr. Meritzer stated he attended a workshop at Chatham on an interior architectural program about accessible play areas for indoor and outdoor play areas and that the person who presented the workshop would also be willing to give her presentation to the Task Force. Mr. Meritzer stated that he and Dr. Seelman attended the Life's Work Breakfast and that one issue was that people needed real work experience and that the office sector is one of the largest for people with disabilities and he is looking into ways that the city can provide this experience. Mr. Meritzer also added that he has done a lot of 311 field work as well as Zoning Board of Adjustment requests field work. Mr. Meritzer added that on Friday the Move Pittsburgh part of the Comprehensive Plan meeting occurred and he will continue to work to ensure that all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan are accessible. Mr. Meritzer added that a number of meetings are occurring in the coming days including the ADA Strategic Planning Committee Meeting and Contextual Design Review Meeting, both of which he will report on at the next meeting. Mr. Meritzer stated that Fisa is funding an accessibility audit of Schenley Park and the coordinating committee meeting is occurring on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Seelman inquired as to whether auditory and sensory issues would be addressed with the audit. Mr. Meritzer replied that those issues will definitely be addressed and that Joan Stein is doing to consultation work and she has had auditory issues addressed on a regular basis.

Mr. Noschese asked about the follow up for the airport accessibility issues, to which Mr. Meritzer replied that he was waiting for direction from the Task Force as to what the next step that the Task Force would want him to pursue. Ms. Jones added that regarding someone being dropped off at the airport that people without escorts can call airlines ahead of time and make them aware that one has accessibility issues for accommodations. Ms. Jones continued that Skycaps will assist anyone coming into the airport that needs assistance if arrangements are not made in advance. Mr. Wasserman inquired whether there was a number for the Skycap service, to which Ms. Jones replied that you must contact that airlines specifically and that they have internal numbers for the Skycaps. Mr. O'Hanlon wanted to add that sometimes when he calls an airline it really depends whether or not that individual employee knows how to set up accommodations and that if there was one number to call it could improve service for accommodations. Mr. Wasserman added that (412)472-5490 & 5491 is the number that he calls to set up

accommodations when he travels, but sometimes he talks to someone from Pittsburgh and sometimes someone from Nashville. Mr. McGann added that staff needs to be trained so that everyone is on the same page and that staff knows what accommodations people need. Mr. Noschese added that he was not sure if a committee was set up but there are still problems with accessibility and is willing to meet with Ms. Jones or anyone at the airport to go over issues he and others have with accessibility. Mr. O'Hanlon interjected and stated that this issue was not on the agenda and that the Task Force could put it on a future agenda. Ms. Jones inquired whether a sub-committee could be established to discuss these issues and set up a potential visit to the airport to identify issues. Mr. McGann agreed that that would be a good plan. Mr. O'Hanlon added that they would address this issue on the next agenda and that it is time for the next presentation.

## **PRESENTATION**

### **Pittsburgh Botanic Garden**

Ms. Vagley stated that she is here on behalf of the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden and wanted to share the garden's plans as well as raise awareness of the garden with the Task Force. Ms. Vagley continued that Mr. Meritzer and Mr. Uhrig had visited the location, south of Settler's Park, to advise on how to make the garden as accessible as possible. Ms. Vagley added that the first garden being worked on currently is the Appalachian Woodlands section and they have started clearing invasive species as well as planting native trees. Ms. Vagley continued that the large red loop trail on the maps she handed out would be made to be totally ADA accessible. Ms. Vagley added that due to ridges and valleys around the locations of the trails there will be some challenges, but they are trying to make as much of the garden as accessible as possible to everyone.

Mr. Noschese inquired if there were any plans for audio system for people to hear as they walk the trails. Ms. Vagley stated that right now there are just in the planning process and feedback like that will help them plan and why they wanted to come to the Task Force to incorporate this information. Ms. Spruill added that audio cassettes to carry around or stationary audio displays could be user friendly and readily available, as well as brail signage for key features. Mr. Noschese continued that also captioning for information that is being spoken would help make the trails accessible to everyone. Dr. Seelman added that smart phone applications could also be used to increase accessibility. Ms. Vagley added that they have committed to making certain trails fully accessible, however currently they do not have the funding to make all the trails fully accessible they believe at this time. Dr. Seelman added that considerations should also be considered for support animals. Mr. O'Hanlon inquired about what type of surface the trails would be. Ms. Vagley responded that it is a packed composite surface and so far they have not had any issues with people using manual wheelchairs on the trail. Ms. Spruill added that they might want to go to the Foundation Center at the Carnegie Library and identify a special funding source as well as the McCune Foundation. Ms. Vagley responded that they are working with the Foundation Center and looking into any possible funding. Ms. Vagley wanted to thank the Task Force for their time and information.

## **VOX POP**

Ms. Carter-Scott wanted to bring up that before they adjourn they need to get the new County Executive on a coming agenda. Ms. Evans stated that they need to setup an annual meeting as there hasn't been on in quite some time. Mr. O'Hanlon stated that they need to look at that and that there are time and money constraints involved. Mr. McGann inquired if it is possible if they could setup a meeting to discuss ACCESS issues. Mr. O'Hanlon responded by saying that that is more of an issue that should be handled by the Committee for Accessible Transportation that meets quarterly at UCP.

Ms. Evans made the motion that the meeting be adjourned, Mr. Wasserman seconded that motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM

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

DATE: January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012  
TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
LOCATION: Large Conference Room  
200 Ross Street