

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

5 Connecticut Avenue, Norwich, Connecticut 06360

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Southeastern Connecticut

Regional Human Services Coordinating Council

A steering committee of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

Draft Minutes

Friday, April 21, 2023, 8:30 AM

Conducted via Zoom

Attendees: Deb Monahan (TVCCA), Kathleen Stauffer (The Arc of Eastern CT), Cathy Zall (New London Homeless Hospitality Center), Carrie Dyer (Reliance House), Dina Sears-Graves (United Way of SECT), Gino DeMaio (Sound Community Services), Amanda Kennedy (SCCOG), Jeanne Milstein (New London Human Services), Jennifer Granger (UCFS), Alison Dvorak (Senior Resources), Claire Silva (Madonna Place), Patrick McCormack (Uncas Health District), Mayor Ron McDaniel (Town of Montville), Jen Muggeo (LLHD), Kate Milde (Norwich Human Services), Cres Secchiaroli (CT DDS), Krista Veneziano (CT DPH), Keith Furniss (CT DOJ), Stephanie Guess (CT DMHAS), Elisha Chornoby (DOC), Chlo-Anne Bobrowski (CSDE), Kyle Casiglio (SCCOG), Erin McBride (Office of Sen. Murphy), Lizbeth Polo-Smith (LLHD), Amparo Bustamante (LLHD)

1. Call to Order

Ms. Monahan called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

2. Welcome and Introductions

The RHSCC welcomed first-time attendees from the state departments of Developmental Services, Public Health, Education, and the Judicial Branch, and guest speakers from Ledge Light Health District.

3. Reaching Undocumented and Immigrant Populations

Ms. Polo-Smith and Ms. Bustamante, community health workers with Ledge Light Health District, spoke on their experiences working with undocumented and immigrant women in the region. Both spoke to the importance of

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establishing trust and of seeing the whole person. By focusing on the immediate needs of the person like enrolling kids in school or finding community resources, trust is built to help overcome the often-present fear of engaging with public agencies. They highlighted that not only is this effective at reaching out to those individuals but also empowers them to become leaders within their own networks where they can pass on this help.

Ms. Muggeo added that they have also started a “women between cultures” program for immigrant women. This program evolved organically from getting together socially. The program is beneficial for the mental health of those who feel cultural isolation after immigrating and provides a network to reach the community for training, resiliency building, or food distribution programs. All of this was driven by what people wanted rather than trying to impose a program from the top-down.

Several others attested to the importance of building trust and getting out into the community rather than waiting for the community to come to you. Ms. Milstein noted a particular program where Ms. Polo-Smith would go out with food and gift cards to distribute in the community at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, going a long way to establishing that trust.

4. Opioid Settlement Update

Ms. Milstein, who sits on the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee, shared updates from the committee’s early work. The committee's intention is to ensure that the settlement money is spent on prevention, addiction treatment, recovery, and other related items rather than being directed into unrelated funds. Decisions about the money will be guided by evidence-based practice and data. Some money has already come in and has been directed towards purchasing Narcan, with the goal of making this product more widely available. Ms. Milstein shared upcoming meeting dates and reiterated that they are open to the public. She said that she will keep the RHSCC updated on their work.

Ms. Stauffer noted the importance of making Narcan more widely available, as availability varies greatly by geography with the more rural areas (such as most of southeastern CT) often lacking ready access.

Ms. Bobrowski highlighted the FDA’s recent approval of Narcan for over-the-counter sale and how that would help availability. She also shared ongoing

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work for regulations to reflect safe practices for in-school handling of Narcan, with the goal of making it available to school nurses.

Ms. Kennedy reminded the council that there are two separate pots of money related to the settlement, one is a state fund guided by the OSAC, the other is municipal and it is up to the municipalities to determine how to use it. She shared that Norwich has been inquiring about regional coordination on how funds are spent.

Ms. Milde spoke about the task force Norwich has established to guide the the municipal effort. They have partnered with Reliance Health on a "how can we help" grant that funds recovery coaches. They've received an initial \$30,000 allocation from the settlement funds, which is split between the recovery coaches, support for staff training, and support for access to treatment and/or employment for clients. They are also buying Narcan and Xylazine test strips.

Ms. Milstein shared New London's response is being guided by their Overdose Action Team, focusing on harm reduction and other evidence-based approaches.

Ms. Dvorak inquired about a larger program similar to what's done with stop the bleed or cpr and incorporating naloxone training into these programs.

Ms. Muggeo and Ms. Dyer shared that their organizations are happy to do naloxone training for those interested. If anyone is interested, they should reach out to jmuggeo@lhd.org or mdoyle@reliancehealthinc.org

Mayor McDaniel shared Montville's efforts thus far, including money to schools for an additional day of substance abuse counsellors, money for transportation for those accessing support groups, and to help those with difficult copay situations get into treatment programs. He also highlighted a recent article in The Day about the cost of naloxone and that while the price has decreased it is still prohibitively expensive for many individuals. This is another area of focus where the town is looking to spend money alongside partners such as Uncas Health District.

Ms. Muggeo highlighted an opportunity for collective advocacy around the extension of Medicaid funding purchases of Naloxone, explaining that DSS has to complete paperwork to continue this option that supports access to naloxone for many without the means to purchase it over the counter.

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5. Member Updates

Ms. Stauffer discussed the unsustainability of the reimbursement rates for those serving DDS clients, and expressed hope that the stronger fiscal condition of the state as compared to prior years will lead to more money reaching those who need it.

Ms. Dyer noted that the legislature is limited by the spending cap.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:21 AM. The next convening is scheduled for Friday, July 21st at 8:30 AM.