NMTAP logo, state with Zia symbol with four stick figures with disabilities

*Keith Maes*

*Chairperson*

**NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, December 14, 2020

Zoom Platform

**Members Present:** Keith Maes (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/DVR - Chair); Bill Newroe (Consumer of AT); Robin Garrison (Disability Rights New Mexico/DRNM); Ricardo Ortega (Consumer of AT); Chris Zafra (Department of Workforce Solutions/DWS); Albert Deimer (Independent Living Resource Center/ILRC); Nat Dean (Consumer of AT) **Absent:** German Benitez (New Mexico Commission for Blind/CFB);

**NMTAP Staff**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Maurice Alvarez (AT Specialist)

**NMTAP Partners present:** Larry McCabe (San Juan Center for Independence/SJCI); Anthony Montoya (Adelante Development Center/ADC), Glenn Damian (Northeastern Regional Educational Cooperative – NMTAP Satellite partner)

**Guests:** none

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Keith M, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:12 pm. Roll call of those present established that a quorum was present.

Keith M asked for approval of the agenda. Nat D moved to approve, Bill N seconded, and all council members approved the agenda by a roll call vote.

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. Nat D moved to approve the minutes with amendments, Robin G seconded, and all council members approved the minutes from Sept 14, 2020 by roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A noted that any COVID stimulus funds did not include AT Programs, but there continues to be efforts for some funds to meet increased needs during the pandemic. Should we receive any stimulus funds, providing hot spots for connectivity in rural areas would be a priority. She reviewed statistics for the last federal fiscal year ending in September 2020 with a decrease in overall numbers due to the pandemic. Device loans were a little more than half of the previous year with 151 individuals borrowing 268 devices compared to 245 individuals last year. We provided 39 individuals with disabilities a device demonstration, which is about one quarter done the previous year. Both of these services were mostly for access in education and community living. With the annual conference (ATC20) being cancelled due to the public health order, our training data decreased to less than one quarter of individuals trained statewide. We provided in-depth training to 327 people and 26 specifically in IT accessibility compared to 1493 in the previous year. These individuals were connected more to employment. We have an accessible video platforms initiative with the Disability Access and Functional Needs Coalition to address our new video connected lifestyles. The federal annual report is due, and Tracy A will be in contact for further reporting information needed from our partners.

Some general program updates included a variety of items. Additional improvements to the database were done including some changes to the internal site to capture more useful statistics and to the external on-line device loan request form. Paper and emailed applications will always be available to ensure access to all persons. SJCI is now entering data on financial loans into the database, which provides accuracy in their reporting. The process of replacing the open AT Specialist position, that has been vacant since May 2020, is taking more time due to the pandemic. The AgrAbility project is continuing with training and support to OT Student Interns since there are no current requests for farm/ranch assessments. There have been inquires for information that has been provided to several individuals. Council members can refer any farmer with a disability or their families to the project through our main phone number or the NMSU website. These services will continue at a minimum virtually, but we also have protocols for site visits in place. Tracy A reminded everyone that for current public health order compliance, all device loans are send via FedEx every Thursday and returned in the same manner, with some scheduled curbside drop off accepted. All demonstrations and trainings are provided virtually.

Tracy A invited Glenn D to talk about activities in the northeastern area of the state. Glenn D noted that they are providing services in the same manner as the main office. NEREC purchased hot spots for the rural areas there but found that individuals were not clear they would be responsible to pay for the service. The schools in that area have been paying for the hot spot service if it is noted in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). He was integral in the planning for on-line schooling at the beginning of the pandemic. Chromebooks have been purchased by schools in that part of the state. They have provided many services with those including setting up accessibility features and training in the use of the features for students, teachers and parents using a video connection. Demonstrations on tablets and Chromebooks have also been done. He also noted challenges in the on-line school process related to IT services difficulties in providing support in homes and the recent report that many students are missing as compared to those registered the previous year. There was discussion regarding accessibility training provided by NMTAP main and Satellite offices with the disability features best to be tailored to the individual rather than simply set for all users.

Linnea F was not available for a full financial report and Tracy A noted no changes in funding at this time.

**FINANCIAL LOANS (NM SEED Loans and Access Loan NM) UPDATE:**

Larry M reviewed the Access Loan NM for the federal fiscal year (FFY20) in which a total of 11 loans were provided mostly for accessible vehicles including wheelchair ramps and lift seats. Note that 7 loans were paid off and one loan defaulted when the pandemic first began. SJCI has the accessible vehicle from that defaulted loan for sale to recoup the funds and defray the loss to the program. There was also a loan that defaulted previously in which the CD was cashed in by the bank, the borrower made a deal to continue paying SJCI directly for that accessible vehicle and that individual has paid about $6000 of that defaulted amount. SJCI also refinanced a couple of loans to accommodate life changes that allow for individuals to continue paying on the loan. There are currently 62 loans being paid on at this time, most which initiated in previous years. Within the Access Loan program, there was a $18,567.86 loss in the investments overall.

The NM SEED Loan program has one loan with a balance of about $837.00 remaining and there was a $8,760.33 loss in one investment fund and a $15,378.36 gain in the other one. He noted that all loans at Wells Fargo bank were paid off with CDs remaining at that bank until maturity. Some funds were transferred into the Four Corners Community Ban k and are available for potential SEED Loans.

**REUSE (Back In Use and DiverseIT - Adelante) UPDATE:**

Anthony M reported that they continue to operate with only him and one half time staff due to the pandemic. They were able to still serve 823 individuals with disabilities with 2103 pieces of medical equipment through curbside service using safe protocols. These numbers are down from last year, in which 2443 pieces of equipment were provided to 1396 individuals, due to several shutdowns with the public health orders. The demand continues for equipment and when they run out of equipment, they do make calls to obtain donations. Nat D suggested they connect with the Coming Home Connections for this as well. Anthony M shared that an older woman who had received a Hoyer lift, transfer chair and other equipment recently passed away at the age of 108. Her grandson noted that her life was much better with the Back In Use equipment when her insurance denied these items and the equipment has been donated back to the program. The staff also enjoyed this woman’s stories of living through many historical changes such as two world wars, the Spanish flu and the beginning of COVID-19. She did not die of COVID.

There were questions regarding the DiverseIT computers, and the manager of that program will be invited to attend the council meetings to share the successes, challenges and participate in questions or suggestions from the council members or public attendees.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Bill N has observed some students on the Autism spectrum using Zoom for their classrooms to be thriving in this mode due to social difficulties. Robin G noted that for others on the spectrum, the on-line school is not working well. It is a very individual situation even with a similar diagnosis. The discussion acknowledged that there are severe challenges to provide a full understanding of materials, communication and learning with the on-line format. Nat D also noted that this is challenging for individuals in the judicial system to get a clear understanding, for example the video platform used, Google Meets, is confusing and blurry. It is important to provide accommodations that may include paper documents in a meeting/classroom, not scroll too quickly in a shared screen, have a clear screen to read lips not just for low vision, and other individual accommodations. Robin G has also been working with a team to have the NM legislature provide closed captioning for this session, change to Zoom (a more accessible platform), and a place to request an accommodation on their website. Keith M noted that advocacy for the individual is also vital and related this is a focus for him working with transition students, including guidance for them to self-advocate. It was noted that when providing advocacy in system and individual situations, specific details of the difficulties clarifies the need and allows those unaware to realize the importance. Keith M thanked council members for sharing their insights.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Discussion included the large decrease in number of students registered for school this year compared to last year and the multiple possible reasons for that. The results of the pandemic are far reaching and it is evident that there is a lot of effort to make things work the best possible.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

There were none.

**ADJOURN:**

Nat D moved, Bill N seconded, and all council members agreed to hold the next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting on March 15, 2021 at 1pm via Zoom. Keith M adjourned the meeting at 3:20 pm.

***Approved on 3/15/21***