

**Regional Autism Assistance Program
Expert Panel Advisory Committee Meeting
August 23, 2022, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Via Zoom**

Name	Organization/Role Representing	Present
Alyson Beytien	Life Connections, Family Member	x
Samantha Cermak	ChildServe	x
Josh Cobbs	Family Advisor	x
James Curry	Family Advisor	x
Connie Fanselow	Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Mental Health and Disability Services Commission	x
Candace Fedeler	Metro West Learning Center	x
Erika Hertel	Regional Autism Assistance Program, Family Member	x
Michelle Holst	Iowa Department of Public Health- 1st Five	
Evelyn Horton	Balance Autism	x
Aaron Kauer	UI Stead Family Children's Hospital Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	x
Andrea Keith	Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services	x
Lisa Kemmerer	Star Autism Support	
Vanessa Kimm	Family Advisor	
Todd Kopelman	UI Stead Family Children's Hospital Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	x
Monica Kurtz	Grant Wood Area Education Agency	x
Stacie Lane	Tanager Place	
Toni Fuller Merfeld	Metro West Learning Center	x
Caroline Moniza	Mercy Family Counseling & EAP	
Steve Muller	Balance Autism	
Kelly Pelzel	UI Stead Family Children's Hospital Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	x
Mary Roberts	Family Advisor	x
Leslie Rogers	ChildServe	x
Thomas Scholz	Division of Child & Community Health	x
Kristine Steinmetz	Autism Society of Iowa, Family Member	x
Rachell Swanson-Holm	Learn the Signs. Act Early., Regional Autism Assistance Program	x
Wendy Trotter	Iowa Department of Education	x
Maria Valdovinos	Drake University	x
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	x
James Curry	Family Advisor	x

Welcome and Introductions

Facilitator: Erika Hertel

- Roll call was taken, and introductions were made. New members were introduced:
 - Monica Kurtz is an Autism Consultant for Grant Wood Area Education Agency.

- Monica is taking the place of Michelle Nuehring.
- Samantha Cermak is a BCBA and the Developmental Center Manager at ChildServe. Samantha is taking the place of Shawn Kolb.

Member Updates:

- **Connie Fanselow, Autism Support Program**
 Connie announced she is now a part of the Department of Health and Human Services. There is still plenty of funding in the Autism Support Program (ASP). Last week, Medicaid released a new rate service for ABA that will be distributed later this week. We are still having challenges with insurance plans that have very limited ABA service limits. We need to visit with legislators to provide more funding for those underfunded since we have funds available in ASP.
 Tom Scholz asked, with the restructuring of PH and DHS, are there any more opportunities to support families and/or should we be talking with legislatures about that? Connie said the “dust hasn’t landed yet,” so there is still uncertainty. She is hopeful but thinks that ASD and Intellectual Disabilities may be in a different division than behavioral health and that may cause some challenges. Connie will let us know how it progresses. She hopes they still work together even if they land in different areas on the final organization chart.
 Evelyn Horton asked if this is the year, we need to ask for increased limits for the ASP funding per child and increased time limit since a new rate has been issued. Connie said maybe, this may be the year. Wendy said the Iowa Autism Council will be discussing priorities at their upcoming meeting and this could be a topic to address.
- **Wendy Trotter, Iowa Department of Education**
 We are starting Cohort 8 of our Autism Navigator training. Another initiative is the SEE-KAS work, looking at universal social emotional supports for all students in the classroom. We are in year 4 of our 6-year project. Our pilot site, Washington Elementary in Mt. Vernon was successful, and teachers felt empowered and rewarded to help students. SEE-KS will be continuing in year 2. They are working on recruiting new sites. Another project is work on literacy and comprehension for neurodiverse learners including autism spectrum disorder. They are looking at contracting with someone to develop the necessary literacy modules with a concentration on comprehension.
- **Kris Steinmetz, Autism Society of Iowa**
 Two conferences are coming up. One is the Employment Conference September 9, with a variety of sessions including a panel of employers with employees with Autism. November 4 is our Annual Fall Conference. We have been meeting regularly with a variety of small groups who are helping plan the conference. We will have some great key notes-Temple Grandin, and Lindsey and Dave - Autism in Love, and breakout sessions - Matt O'Brien on challenging behavior, Jan Turbes and Sue Askeland - How to tell family members, friends, and someone with Autism about the diagnosis, Lindsey and Dave - Autism in Love, Erika Hertel and some Family Navigators will be presenting on “What’s Next” for parents of newly diagnosed children.
- **Evelyn Horton, Balance Autism, Registered Behavior Technician update**
 We did get some rules changed regarding the RBTs. The RBTs no longer need a specific college degree to provide services, which gives more flexibility with any bachelor’s degree qualifying, and starting September 1st we can bill for services. We requested exception to the rules previously when only certain degrees were approved, and it took a long time to get a ruling. A task force meeting with DHS is planned to try to get a grace period for staff members without a degree who are pursuing the RBT certification. Currently they can’t bill for the staff member to provide services while pursuing the RBT certification, which takes time to obtain. They are also working to get CMS codes permanently approved for providing ABA via telehealth. Balance Autism piloted an integrated pre-school program this summer and loved it. They contracted with a teacher and provided a BCBA, and it worked really well.
- **Todd Kopelman, UIHC Psychiatry**
 Kelly reported for Todd, who was with a patient. They are working on a better triage system for adult diagnostic services, so they work with the right people for their evaluation. They are working to encourage other providers to help with diagnosing to help combat the long wait lists. Lea Boldt is doing a SPACE (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions group for

parents of children with autism and anxiety. This is a pilot and if successful and popular she will do more (by telehealth). <https://www.spacetreatment.net/>. It's been offered in the department of psychiatry and Lea had been working with that program since inception. The pilot is currently full. The Autism Center, Kelly will be ready to offer Project Impact training for providers this winter. She is waiting for the paperwork to go through and will then finalize plans.

- **Andrea Keith, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS)**
IVRS has been working with the Autism Speaks, Autism Friendly employee training program. All staff members are taking the training to help agency be ASD friendly.
- **Leslie Rogers, Samantha Cermak, ChildServe**
ChildServe has collaborated with Autism Center for years and they are offering Project Impact as well. They plan to train and certify ChildServe providers. They offer Project Impact at all of their sites in Iowa, Johnston, Ames, and Iowa City. They expanded PEERS to Iowa City site with two groups in the fall with their new psychologist, Matt Kressin. They are offering psychological testing for children ages four and up. Samantha said they have eight practicum students at all sites and are offering services to all sites.
- **Brad Zelinger, Stride Autism Centers**
Stride has five centers in Iowa- Clive, Johnston, Urbandale, Hiawatha, and Davenport, and plans to open sites in Des Moines and Waukee in the future.
- **Alyson Beytien, Life Connections**
We opened a clinic in Harlan Iowa (35 minutes from Omaha) that has been well-received. We are opening an ABA clinic in Decorah this winter and have plans for two more locations in 2023. She wondered if anyone received a letter about a new ruling that Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) can now bill ABA codes. Also, they added a different modifier between a RBT and bachelor's degree with different rates. Alyson will send out the letter through Erika, to share with members to get input on its meaning and ramifications.
- **Toni Merfeld, Candice Fedeler, Metro West Learning Center**
Expanding ABA, Speech, and OT side of services. They are needing more service space, so plans are to expand the space as well.
- **Rachell Swanson-Holm, Learn the Signs. Act Early**
Rachell reported highlights of the last year of the CDC/AUCD Act Early/COVID Response grant. The grant will end September 30 and high reach agencies like Child Care Resource and Referral and 1st Five all completed trainings and material distribution to spread provider and parent engaged developmental monitoring and early identification along with resiliency building.
- **Erika Hertel, Regional Autism Assistance Program**
The Autism Basics series for parents/caregivers starts September 20. It's a four session webinar series with Kelly Pelzel aimed at families with newly diagnosed children. Anyone is welcome to attend, but information will remain Iowa-specific. The course has been approved for foster parent training credit. RAP continues to look at family navigator coverage statewide to provide services/supports and look at service equity.

Discussion:

Family Navigators are reporting that families are sharing their frustrations that providers are not returning calls. They are also reporting that Iowa Total Care denials for ASD services are becoming more frequent. Leslie said they are seeing that too. Josh said there is a MCO WatchDog group on Facebook that is monitoring denials, not only in ABA but in many services and with both MCOs. Mary Roberts shared that that Townhalls are taking place with DHS. IME and staff are in attendance and want to hear about these denials.

Evelyn shared denials on AME's from Amerigroup. They are authorized in advance, but then say the charges are above contractual limitations.

Brad said they deny the hours of service in some cases. They then go back in to submit a corrected claim to get it sorted out. Brad said they are trying to add staff to get families called back and admits they are guilty of not getting calls returned to families in a timely way. They are working on this and have hired an additional staff member to help.

Erika said FNs have heard from families that schools are having a hard time with the para workforce shortage. Toni shared that schools could consider the allowing ABA providers/RBTs in the classroom to help provide additional support, but to date most are unwilling.

Josh reported they are working with school cafeterias to offer nutritional training opportunities for the Autistic student. There is also a free course out there for Autistics on self-advocacy. Always looking to partner. They are looking for updated adult programming models that could be replicated. There is a gap for programs for those adults not in an HCBS home. He would like to hear from anyone who is aware of adult programming that is working well and could be used as a model.

James-We went through attaining guardianship for our son. We open enrolled so he could attend a Plus Program (life and vocational skills). He is on a list for voc rehab programming. Utilizing SCL and Respite when staff available. Not sure what more is out there. Would like to know so son has a full life experience. Will stay in Plus program until he is 21 years old.

Tom Scholz reported we now have an ARNP in the Creston Regional Center, Rebecca McCann. She comes from a primary care background and it's uncertain if she will do any ADOS screening with the AEA there as they had done before. In Ottumwa, a physician with experience in diagnosing and treating ASD is joining the Regional Center there.

Erika shared her son started a social group for adults in the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids area. He has had two others join with running the group, called the Socially Anxious Hangout Group. They hold weekly events to play boardgames, and have attended other events like trivia, movies, etc. The site on Meetup has almost 300 members, but a smaller number have come to the in-person events. They welcome neurodivergent (ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, OCD, Tourettes, anxiety, depression, etc.) and are LGBTQ+ friendly.

Connie has had several adults reach out to get a diagnoses or assistance. Some have said they were told no one diagnoses at CDD. Kelly said she will find out who is diagnosing, Psychiatry for sure will diagnose. Kelly will provide a direct contact. Kris has a list of adult diagnosticians. CDD scheduling will be notified to ensure accurate information will be provided. Erika mentioned RAP gets a lot of calls inquiring about this as well.

Kelly shared this spring the Autism Society of Iowa will be having a conference focused on the needs of severely affected adults with ASD. The conference will be on Zoom.

Kris asked if the two new providers at CHSC should be included on the diagnostic provider list, but Tom said not quite yet until they complete orientation and decide on the array of services they will offer.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, 10/25/2022, 10:00-2:00, in person in Iowa City, further details to follow