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, September 14, 2020

Zoom Platform

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

**NMTAP Staff**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Jesse Armijo (AT Coordinator); Maurice Alvarez (AT Specialist); Linnea Forsythe (Governor’s Commission on Disability/GCD Acting Director)

**NMTAP Partners present:** Larry McCabe (San Juan Center for Independence/SJCI); Anthony Montoya (Adelante Development Center/ADC); Leslie Wright (San Juan Center for Independence/SJCI)

**Guests:** Coby Livingstone (Vice Chair, Statewide Independent Living Council)

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Keith M, Council Chair, reviewed the guidelines of the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and our general courtesy guidance for virtual meetings. He asked that partners email reports to Tracy A prior to the meetings in order to provide them to council members in advance for accommodations. The Chair also noted that a standing item has been added to the agenda for members to share their ideas that can be beneficial to the council and program activities. It was also made clear that council members who refer New Mexicans to NMTAP services make a difference to those individuals.

NMTAP Council Chair, Keith M, called the meeting to order at 1:10 pm. By roll call of those present it was established that a quorum was present. Guests were asked to introduce themselves.

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

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. Bill N moved to approve the minutes with amendments, German B seconded, and all council members approved the minutes from June 22, 2020 by roll call vote.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A stated there is a general decrease in data numbers of services due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. She described how the program is providing limited services; mailing device loans every Thursday starting on May 7, 2020, curbside pickup of returned devices starting on July 1, 2020 on Wednesdays. Demonstrations re-started on June 2, 2020 and trainings on June 23, 2020 through a video platform. The “On-line Schooling” AT training provided by Jesse A and Maurice A was so popular, we offered it a second time with great attendance.

The state fiscal year report was completed as it relates to the budget and the GCD/NMTAP annual report will be completed by the end of the year. Tracy A reminded program partners that the federal report will be due soon as the year ends September 30, 2020 and she will be in contact for reporting information.

Our nationally housed database has been updated. All staff and partners will be participating in database training this month. NMTAP staff will be available for questions on data entry since we have been already using the new system for over a year. With the expansion of features, NMTAP staff will review changes that may benefit or streamline our processes.

NMTAP staff are also working on video conferencing accessibility in collaboration with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Commission for the Blind. We will focus on challenges such as cognitive, audio processing or fine motor control to enhance the expertise of our partner agencies. When this is complete, we will post it on the NMTAP website under web accessibility and will provide it to council members.

The AgrAbility project is close to bringing Occupational Therapists (OT) on board through New Mexico State University (NMSU) to do the farm/ranch assessment. We had four OT Student Interns, doing fieldwork per the grant, who provided a training on back health on August 29, 2020. More OT interns are due for fieldwork later this month and will join the OT contractors for site assessments. NMTAP staff is responsible for AgrAbility training and are working on a training to be held in November.

Linnea F reported that FY20 was closed with about $477,000 in expenditures and the FY21 projected budget is about $527,000. This budget allots approximately $100,000 in contracts for partners, $323,000 in personnel costs and other costs will be about $102,000. The AgrAbility grant funds will be reduced from the original $62,000 since the OTs will be paid through NMSU. Acquiring new AT is a priority and the team is always looking for opportunities to fund that. We have one staff vacancy that we hope to fill this year.

Linnea F added that Disability Access and Functional Needs (AFN) group, along with the partners working on video conferencing accessibility, will create a video training for this as well. She also noted that there is an aggregate report of the AT Programs across the nation that was provided recently by our federal partners. We shared this with our NM Senators to let them know how services continued through COVID-19 stay at home orders. Tracy A agreed to send it to all council members with the next communication and we will post it to our website as well.

**FINANCIAL LOANS (NM SEED Loans, Access Loan NM & Community Fund) UPDATE:**

Larry M reviewed the SEED Loan program financial report. There were no new loans provided and two loans remain open for this quarter. The balance of one loan is $1,181 and the other is $1,227, one loan balance for $13,082 defaulted in July 2019 and all others were paid off. For any loans that default, the Certificate of Deposit (CD), that was created to guarantee the loan, is cashed out to pay the balance on that loan. It is up to the financial institution, DreamSpring, whether they will repossess the equipment and for the default noted here, the flatbed trailer and stucco spray equipment was not repossessed. In response to council member questions, it was confirmed that all loans through the previous financial institution, US Bank, were paid off. DreamSpring is where the two open loans are held. The SEED Loan investments accounts with Morgan Stanley reports were also reviewed by Larry M and the Director of SJCI, Leslie Wright. Between the two investment accounts, there has been about a $10,000 loss in one and about a $24,000 gain from the other since 2019. The SEED Loan Council decided to change to Four Corners Community Bank for better interest rates, so the checking account money held at Wells Fargo and US Bank will be moved there. About $2,000 will remain in Wells Fargo checking to collect the interest from the two remaining CDs held there.

Access Loan NM has provided eleven loans up to date for a total of $295,444.42 for mostly vehicle accessibility. Due to COVID-19 things slowed down with a few loans done remotely. Leslie W gave a synopsis of the Morgan Stanley investment and bank accounts. One investment account has $182,739 and has gained $73,959 since last year. The other investment account has $197,185.35 and has lost $21,608.12. With advice from Morgan Stanley during COVID-19 all these accounts have not lost as much as others in the market. The CD creation account at Four Corners Community Bank has $59,240.31 balance for potential loans. This bank also holds the CDs to guarantee the current loans.

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

Anthony M reported that they are in phase one of re-opening, which started in June/July, and have only part-time staff due to COVID-19 public health orders. For this quarter 300 equipment items were provided to 132 individuals. Services are by appointment and curbside only. Fifteen to twenty requests are received daily for medical equipment. Consumers are always satisfied with services. Council members request that the DiverseIT manager also provide a short report at the council meetings. Maurice A added that Jordan Robinson from DiverseIT told her he would not be available for this meeting, but said they are also working by appointment only and completing between two to three computer requests each day. They are using COVID-19 symptom questions to screen consumers as well.

Anthony noted that his staff person, Daniella, attended the COVID training that Tracy A referred them to regarding ReUse services. It was provided by the AT Programs federal technical assistance group and Back in Use found it very useful. They have implemented some of the practices and welcome further training. They will always be included.

Nat D shared that the Coming Home Connections program in Santa Fe also has lots of used DME for loan and offers it as a referral resource as needed. She also thanked the NMTAP program for changing lives, referring to two individuals she connected to Adelante for equipment. She shared how both persons have not only progressed, but have thrived, in life due to equipment provided.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Keith M opened this new standing agenda item with a note that it is to obtain information on the impact council members program or independent work is helping the community through AT, as well as how to connect people to NMTAP services. Nat D feels that the video connections now widely used due to stay-at-home orders have also “leveled the playing field” for individuals with disabilities. Working from home has decreased a previously assumed requirement that work be done in the office setting. She noted that American Sign Language interpreters for all the Governor’s updates provided has been great and were not automatically offered until now. The NMTAP on-line schooling training was great and she recommends further opportunities for teachers and parents. She also noted that true accessibility in the court systems is not available except for sign language interpretation.

Keith M asks that council members come prepared to share at the next meeting as a critical part of collaboration between NMTAP, AT and the needs each observes in the community.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Chris Z noted that a new employee on-boarding will be provided soon for the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists and requests NMTAP to present services available. This will be arranged through Jesse A and Chris Z for the Veteran’s program at Department of Workforce Solutions. He also recommends this be offered as an option to other state agency on-boarding processes.

Bill N referred to the initiative of NMTAP to review accessibility when using web-based platforms, as discussed at the June meeting. He noted the need for physical accessibility to computers using peripheral AT needs to be included and is pleased that this is being addressed. There was a discussion on assessing the needs in the community through surveys, general outreach and council member input.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Council members and staff engaged in discussion regarding education accessibility. It was noted that some schools have special education students coming into the schools to provide the one-on-one interaction and AT needed for education. It was noted that Parents Reaching Out is continuing to support access for students through education and support. Maurice A noted that the NMTAP website has lots of resource information specifically regarding on-line schooling and encourages referrals to it by council members.

Linnea F shared that the AFN group is working on an After Action Report that will assess what the experience for people with disabilities has been during COVID, noting what has worked and what needs improvement. The use of a survey was discussed as part of this project and she will follow up with this council on it. This report, anticipated to be forming in the coming months, will be provided to the State of New Mexico.

Maurice A brought up ideas regarding advertising the financial loan programs. Updating specific Access Loan NM and SEED Loan brochures, in addition to the NMTAP brochure information, would be ideal for targeted outreach. Other state programs also utilize postcard advertisement to audiology/hearing aid providers, vehicle modification places and other locations providing AT that could help uninsured or underinsured individuals obtain needed AT. NMTAP wants to increase collaboration with SJCI to improve advertisement and outreach about these financial loan services.

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting was scheduled for December 14, 2020 at 1pm via Zoom. Keith M adjourned the meeting at 3:28 pm.

***Approved on 12.14.20***