

Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues

May 10, 2023, Meeting Minutes

KAT Knoxville Station

I. Meeting was called to order at 3:06 pm.

II. Roll Call:

Members: Alexander, Ajinkya, Barber, Black, Brooks, Carter, Childress, Jenkins, Landfather, Lowe, Maxwell, Mathison, Mull, Robertson, Shimmin-Orr, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch

City of Knoxville Staff: Cook, Dziubak

Present: Alexander, Ajinkya, Barber, Brooks, Carter, Childress, Landfather, Lowe, Maxwell, Mathison, Shimmin-Orr, Simmons, Spangler, Villanueva, Welch

Absent: Black, Jenkins, Mull, Robertson

Guests: Ben Harrington (MHAET)

Interpreters: Monique Johnson & Marsha Coles-Felix

III. Approval of April Minutes: Simmons made the first motion, Childress seconded the motion, motion carried.

IV. Mental Health Association of East Tennessee / Ben Harrington (MHAET)

- From <https://www.mhaet.com/meet-the-staff/>
 - CEO Ben Harrington, MA Ed, has worked in non-profit health for more than 30 years, including 28 years as the CEO of the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee, which he has worked at since 1994. After 4 years in the chronic physical health arena, Ben moved to the Mental Health Association of Greater Knoxville which would later

become the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee. The agency name was changed to serve persons from the Georgia to Virginia borders and all communities in between. Switching jobs helped him realize how personally connected he is to mental health issues which affect so many. His passion to intervene earlier and in more impactful ways led to the creation of two of our signature programs – the Mental Health 101 program in Fall of 2000 and the Peer Recovery Call Center in 2013. Ben is married to Norma Harrington. They have two sons Donovan and Jackson and two “fur babies” Baxter Bugtussell (a Jack Russell) and Lady Violet (a Goldendoodle). He earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Heidelberg University and a Master of Arts Degree in Education Counseling & Guidance from Bowling Green State University.

- From <https://www.mhaet.com/what-we-do/>
 - At the Mental Health Association of East Tennessee, our vision is to build a behavioral health system responsive to the needs of its community. We provide essential early intervention, information, and client services, including invaluable peer support services to thousands of persons annually, additionally, we advocate on behalf of those who sometimes are not able to advocate for themselves.
 - Early Intervention Programs
 - Mental Health 101
 - Mental Health 101 is our early intervention program for middle and high school students across Tennessee. [Mental Health Association staff](#) visit more than 120 schools annually, serving over 30,000 students in the academic year.
 - Students are eager to learn about mental health because many know their peers are struggling with mental health problems or struggling themselves. Our outcome data shows gains in demonstrable knowledge of mental illness signs and symptoms, symptom duration, suicidal behaviors, and how to intervene.
 - B4Stage 4

- When we think about cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, we don't wait years to treat them. We start way before Stage 4. We begin with prevention. And when people are in the first stage of those diseases, and have a persistent cough, high blood pressure, or high blood sugar, we try immediately to reverse these symptoms. This is what we should be doing when people have serious mental illnesses, too. When they first begin to experience symptoms such as loss of sleep, feeling tired for no reason, feeling low, feeling anxious, or hearing voices, we should act.
- B4Stage 4 is an educational & awareness campaign that speaks to the soul of our organization, our community, those struggling or who will struggle with mental health or substance use problems. Early intervention is key to preventing the high physical, emotional and financial toll of delayed treatment.
- Contact us at [865-584-9125](tel:865-584-9125) or email us at info@mhaet.com to have MHA staff or volunteers present to your group on B4Stage4!
- Client Services
 - MHA Call Center
 - Help is just a phone call ([865-584-9125](tel:865-584-9125)) or email (info@mhaet.com) away! The Call Center is open Monday – Tuesday: 8:30 AM to 7:00 PM, Wednesday through Friday 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM, and on Saturdays from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
 - Our knowledgeable staff can help you find treatment, support or other resources which best fit your needs, location, and insurance status.
 - They will gladly follow up with you to make sure you were able to get what you needed, if our referral resources were appropriate, and to see if we can help you further.

- Follow Up Support
 - The Mental Health Association offers all services to eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin or disability.
- Peer Support
 - Have you or a loved one been dealing with an emotional struggle? Do you feel that no one would understand what you are dealing or can't help you? You are not alone, and you do not need to make your recovery journey all by yourself!
 - The Peer Recovery Call Center staff knows exactly what you may be experiencing because they have walked a mile in your shoes. Each staff member is a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist. They got help. They are in recovery. And they are ready to help you, join them in recovery!
 - If you need treatment for a mental health or substance abuse issue, the PRCC will work with you to find the best treatment and support resource available to you. Give us a call! [\(865\)-584-9125](tel:865-584-9125) or email us at info@mhaet.com.
- Free Screenings
 - One in five Tennesseans will be affected by mental illness this year; however, nearly two thirds of those struggling with a diagnosable condition do not get the treatment and support that would help them recover.
 - Most people suffer unnecessarily from multiple episodes of mental illness, for 10-12 years from start of their symptoms until diagnosis and start of treatment.
- Treatment Access Bank
 - The Treatment Access Bank helps people that have financial challenges get quality mental health care. We cover up to 12 therapy sessions with a licensed therapist and connect people with our Peer Recovery Call Center for support while in the program and beyond. While some people are able to get therapy through programs

like Medicare and Medicaid, many people with private insurance may still have gaps that make therapy hard to afford- which is where we come in.

- Program Qualifications
 - The Treatment Access Bank aims to serve people in East Tennessee who cannot afford mental health care due to financial challenges.
 - Client barriers include, but are not limited to,
 - Low household income or experiencing financial stress.
 - Uninsured or underinsured (do not have behavioral health coverage through their insurance policy, high deductible/copay, etc.)
 - Unable to afford therapy without program participation.
 - Requirements for program clients include, but are not limited to,
 - Have at least one barrier as described above.
 - Able to give voluntary consent.
 - At least 16 years old.
 - Live in MHAET service area:
 - Knox, Blount, Sevier, Loudon, Union, Grainger, Roane, Jefferson, Anderson
 - Able to pay a small copay (based on income).
 - People interested in the program should know that the Treatment Access Bank cannot meet certain needs as we only offer up to 12 sessions per client at this time. Those who are experiencing the following are invited to explore other resources on our website or call our Peer Recovery Call Center at 865-584-9125 for additional support.
 - Serious mental illness

- Needing medication
 - Actively in substance abuse
 - Younger than 16
 - Needing court-ordered services
 - Can afford sliding scale therapy
- Partnering Providers
 - We recruit different therapists in East Tennessee to supply services for those unable to afford therapy. Our licensed partnering therapists have decades of experience in mental health care and work with diverse populations with a wide range of concerns. Therapists help clients meet their treatment goals over the course of 10-12 sessions. Providers donate one session per client and play an essential role in our clients' recovery journeys and making behavioral healthcare more accessible in our communities.
- Advocacy
 - System Advocacy
 - Seventy years ago, the mental health system in Tennessee was limited to state hospital-based care under the auspices of the Tennessee Department of Corrections!
 - Our founders, including Mrs. Helen Ross McNabb, shamed the legislature to right that wrong and create the Department of Mental Health, eventually leading to the modernization of our mental health and substance abuse services system.
 - The behavioral health system is not perfect and is continuously evolving as it adjusts to meet the needs of our communities. Our system advocacy work involves targeted community meetings, needs assessment planning, statewide and local coalition building.

- Presentation

- The Covid-19 pandemic called additional general anxiety and there is concern about everyday needs being met. Harrington reported that during this time their call center and mental health screenings went up.
- Post Covid there have been increases in rent and economic issues that have created an increase in people that are fearful and anxious. Call Center and screenings went up again which means that the numbers of people needing help has stayed higher, there is a change in the hardwiring of the brain that is very hard to unravel.
- For people that have had Covid and underlying conditions, the pandemic has sped up the illness, for instance dementia. Society cannot just snap back.
- There is a shortage of mental health professionals which makes it harder to find/get treatment.
- One positive though is that the public sector providers rose to the occasion and continued to provide resources during the pandemic which included expanding telehealth and call centers.
- MHAET started the Treatment Access Bank which aims to serve people in East Tennessee who cannot afford mental health care due to financial challenges. (see above) They have provided about 400 hours of treatment to date for these people.
- Cook had a question about the 988 National number for help, and if there has been an increase in calls or have they stayed the same?
 - The answer is that when calling 988, the calls get patched through to a TN number about 60% of the time but the call volume has not really increased there. MHAET helps to de-escalate situations, but also are equipped to conduct follow-up calls to check on people, building relationships to keep the person supported in their mental health journey.

- Cook mentioned that a colleague of Mr. Harrington had reached out to her about help/support from an ADA standpoint and if everyone is like them, they have a great team going. Cook mentioned that Mr. Harrington's week has been very hectic and that we appreciate that he took the time to visit with us.

V. Member Advocacy and Information – Barber, Entities that Help People with Disabilities

- Barber has an adult son with autism and worked with Joni and Friends, specifically with their outreach and getaway programs for five years. He is now a pastor with Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church.
- His presentation focuses on how organizations, restaurants, parks, non-profits, houses of worship, stores, public buildings, public transportation, can serve people with people with disabilities.
- The first level is the bare minimum, accessibility: can a person with a disability access the building and use the services provided.
- The second level is dignity: are the people with disabilities treated with dignity, not just allowed to be in the buildings, but are there opportunities for employment? Barber mentioned how Simmons had discussed an issue with Jaboni's bathrooms a few months ago, where the accommodation was technically there but there were still accessibility issues (furniture storage) making it unusable for Simmons.
- Barber's focus has been Houses of Worship, as traditionally they have not been great at providing accommodation, and in some cases because of the age of the buildings where they must go back and be retrofitted. This means that sometimes ramps have been added where they are unusable, or accessible parking spaces are places on a hill making them unusable due to the slope. Church sanctuaries can run into issues as well because the stage in some sanctuaries is inaccessible or seating is only in the rear of the building. Barber had spoken to a church that was spending six figures to renovate the children's area, and when he asked them how they are including children with disabilities, he found out it had not been a consideration.

- Barber reported that in some instances churches doing the bare minimum and not including the parishioners with disabilities in the planning and changes being made. He mentioned a church was saying to him that they have their members with Down Syndrome be greeters for the church, which he said is great but only if that is what they want to do.
- Barber stated that improving things for people with disabilities at a church typically begins with a buddy type program.
- Simmons pointed out that sometimes people overthink things, and that including those with disabilities can make things a little simpler.

VI. Committee Reports:

Bylaws:

- Did not meet this month.

Membership:

- Introduction of new members Ashley Wells Ajinkya and Hilary Brooks
- All members introduced themselves to the new members.
- Needs to meet soon to discuss holding interviews for potential nominees and officer candidates, as well as times and days to do such.
- Member Logan Black has resigned from CODI at the end of his interim term ending June 30, 2023.

Transportation:

- Met on May 8, 2023, but only two members, Welch and Simmons were present in addition to City Liaison Dziubak, and meeting was dismissed early due to lack of attendance.

VII. Strategic Plan Reports:

Livability:

- Met on May 4, 2023
- Knoxville Chamber Blast/Downtown Awareness Campaign

- The group discussed the verbiage of the email blast, from the last updated copy (provided by Dziubak) which was from February 2023. We added the number of disabled people in the Knoxville area from a 2018 study which estimates a 13.5% of Knoxville residents have at least one disability, and that the number is expected to increase. Dziubak shared that Lauren Longmire has been our contact at the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, but that she will double check that Ms. Longmire is still the most relevant person to send the email blast too.
- Jenkins made a motion and Lowe seconded the motion; all were in favor of accepting the updated verbiage of the email blast. However, the motion will be taken to the full CODI body at the May 10, 2023 meeting, before being sent to the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce.
- Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Email Blast:
 - Ask yourself, if you could afford everyone the opportunity to benefit from your business and services, would you? What if you were missing out on 13.5% number of sales? During the 2018 census, it was reported that 13.5% of Knoxville Metropolitan Area residents reported at least one disability, and that number is growing every day! What if you could be a part of a movement bigger than yourself, such as striving to become one of the largest Disability Friendly Cities in the country? Would you participate?
If you answered “Yes” to the call, then the Knoxville Mayor’s Council on Disability Issues (CODI) wants to speak to YOU! By participating in a short voluntary CODI Accessibility Checklist, you will gain helpful information you may not have thought of that can help you attract additional consumers you were not reaching. When a business or establishment successfully completes the Disability Friendly Accessibility Standards Checklist, they

will receive a window cling that reads, “This Business is Disability Friendly” and be listed on the City of Knoxville’s CODI webpage.

So, what are you waiting for? Join us in our efforts in transforming our community into the most Disability Friendly City in the country! For more information you can visit the CODI Website at

www.KnoxvilleTN.gov/CODI, or contact: Misha Dziubak at 865-215-2423, or MDziubak@KnoxvilleTN.gov

- Spangler suggested mentioning the spending power of people with disabilities.
- Carter mentioned that dollars and cents are what people are interested in, for instance what is the bottom-line dollar.
- Simmons asked what dollar amount do we put in place of the percentage?
- Spangler said that she thought the disposable spending was between 24 and 27 billion dollars nationwide.
- Cook suggested combining the number of disabilities with seniors because looking at statistics from AARP seniors have the buying power, so if we can find that number that would be good.
- Landfather said 13.5% speaks to him, as he cares about his version of that, not the nationwide numbers.
- Spangler looked up disposable income of people with disabilities which was reported at a half trillion.
- Dziubak mentioned that Mathison is looking for the numbers from 2018 and the census for Knox County specifically.
- Simmons mentioned that keeping it simple is good.
- Landfather said we can strike the word number or go back and rewrite it and vote next meeting.
- Cook said why not take out sentence two and read the blurb aloud without it.

- Landfather says that when you are asking a specific question, such as the 13.5%, the brain wants a specific answer.
 - Chamber of Commerce full CODI body vote: Barber motioned to accept the Chamber Blast with the addendum of taking out the word “number” in the second sentence, Mathison seconded. A full body roll call vote took place and motion unanimously passed.
- Mull went over the May CODI Accessible Survey participants according to the sign-up sheet from our last retreat. Mull will contact the following individuals and set up the survey date & location for May: Aquayla Maxwell, Joel Simmons, Nancy Welch, and Hank Jenkins.
- Dziubak called on each member during the May regular monthly meeting and noted months that members will try to complete surveys.
 - Lowe stated that she is willing to go with any new members who feel they need support while completing their first checklist. Landfather stated that he thought he had signed up. Mull stated that Landfather could have signed up for one of the months that have already occurred. Dziubak stated that everyone’s effort to complete these and help other members complete them is greatly appreciated.

Universal Design:

- Met on May 9, 2023
- Universal Design met and discussed how to regroup and figure out how to move forward now that our Visitable Type C presentation to City of Knoxville has been completed.
 - Mayor has suggested CODI partner with a non-profit agency for an event of this type and Dziubak suggested discussion over potential entities to partner with.
 - Discussion ensued with Simmons inquiring if anyone has been out into the community to speak with builders because he has

gone to several home shows and reached out to the President of the Greater Knoxville Homebuilders Association and found that most are already educated on Universal Design and what it encompasses. Simmons believes that the building community already understands their demographics as well as who is moving into and out of the area, elaborating that builders are currently selling everything they are building.

- Dziubak suggested if this is the case, Universal Design could do a round table discussion instead where they discuss what they are seeing in terms of Universal Design and current needs of the community in addition to any issues they are experiencing in providing these features.
- Simmons mentioned that many builders are doing Universal Design aspects, though they do not realize it. Dziubak responded that perhaps Universal Design Committee can present on the aspects that builders are already successfully doing and encourage them to promote it as Universal Design. Childress responded that if the builders saw it as profitable, they would be more likely to do it.
- Simmons stated that it has to have some sort of entertainment value providing a reason for them to come out and listen to what we have to say, and that we need something more attractive. Childress replied that that attractiveness is the luxury of Universal Design. That's the real selling point of what we're trying to do because roll-in showers or step-in showers seem more of a luxury in dwellings.
- Simmons stated that he believes that universally designed homes will be built when it's code enforced, and that with the average apartment building, it will be kept at three stories tall because at four an elevator must be installed. He thinks it would be nice if a certain portion had to be made fully accessible, and that from his experience even those deemed accessible are not fully so.
 - Robertson commented that for the Deaf and hard of hearing communities, it's a bit different when it comes to physical accessibility and technology because they don't need homes designed for wheelchair use but rather depend on lighting and other accessible options.
- Dziubak mentioned that the group could bring in some of these builders and contractors during the universal design meeting to speak

to the group and tell a little bit about what they're experiencing. Childress replied that it would probably be key to have them come into one of our meetings just by themselves to provide more one on one time.

- Welch suggested speaking with the real estate companies since they would know who is closing on houses and are knowledgeable about what is selling and how houses in the market that are deemed accessible are selling.
- Dziubak brought and distributed the Age in Place Workbooks for each committee member. Dziubak will pull other material for P. Robertson on our past discussions such as the Universal Type C and Livability and encouraged Robertson to look on KnoxvilleTN.gov/CODI for Meeting Minutes after he inquired about past Universal Design meetings.
- Cook mentioned that there had been a meeting with the mayor and maybe circling back needs to happen regarding the current codes.
- Spangler asked who writes the code?
 - Landfather replied that there is IBC (International Building Codes) but that there are also city and county codes that builders have to meet to get permits. Landfather stated changing local codes was what we recently met with the mayor about, but due to prior commitments it does not look like it will happen right away.
- Dziubak said that there was a positive outlook, and though changes are not eminent, good things now being looked at that should increase universal design and accessibility within the City of Knoxville.
- Simmons pointed out that with interest rates going up, it may change the market somewhat for buyers and builders.
- Landfather stated there have been price decreases in the market.
- Simmons said to get the niche builders may be a better idea, as the builders that are selling everything they build do not care.

VIII. New Business:

- City of Knoxville's Neighborhood Resource Fair will be held on Saturday, August 12, 2023, at the Jacobs Building in Chilhowee Park, located at 3301 East Magnolia Avenue. The event will be from 8:00

a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and Dziubak is looking for volunteers to staff the table.

- Spangler and Childress both volunteered.
- Alexander has an event coming up where he is representing Parks and Rec Friday on Market Square from 9:30-3:00 for disability Resource Center.

IX. Announcements & Public Forum:

- Maxwell said that she has a representative of KAT that will be giving a tour of the building after the meeting concludes.
- Landfather shared that he had an issue when speaking with the VA to have his disability increased, which went up to 80% from 75% for five days but then went back down. He also stated that his father who is a Vietnam veteran is still trying to get his benefits increased from 30%.
- Barber said that last time we spoke about the AARP grant program, the applications were due January or February of 2024.
- Cook is a volunteer with AARP East TN and has read that there were over 140 grant proposals in the state of TN. Knoxville being a disability friendly city, a meeting about that is imminent, and hopefully there will be more information coming out by this time next month.
- Barber asked if there is a mechanism that we can create a special committee?
 - Dziubak says yes we can do that and asked if one of our new members that has the copy of by-laws they were given today to let Cook look for the exact wording
 - Cook read the information aloud about creating a special committee and electing a chairperson, which must have at least 3 people and will be called the AARP Grant Committee
 - Dziubak asked for a show of hands: Barber, Villanueva, Welch, Ajinkya. Villanueva agreed to be the chairperson.

X. Meeting was Adjourned at 4:36 p.m.