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

*Robin Garrison – Chair*

*Ricardo Ortega – Vice Chair*

**NEW MEXICO TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

Monday, January 22, 2024

3916 Juan Tabo Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM, and Zoom Platform

**Members Present:** Robin Garrison (Disability Rights New Mexico/DRNM); Brian Schobel (Consumer of AT); Karen Wiley (Consumer of AT) [in person] and Bill Newroe (Consumer of AT); Eric Gonzales (Commission for the Blind); Dennis Campos (Department of Workforce Solutions/DWS); Julie Bisbee (Guardian Consumer of AT); Ricardo Ortega (Consumer of AT); TJ Chester (Independent Living Resource Center/ILRC) [virtual]. **Absent:** Andrea Sterling (Consumer of AT) excused; Pilar Murray (Family of Consumer of AT) excused; Valerie Griego (NM Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/NMDVR) excused.

**NMTAP Staff Present**: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Lisa McNiven (Deputy Director of Governor’s Commission on Disability/GCD); Jesse Armijo (NMTAP AT Coordinator)

**NMTAP Partners Present:** Anthony Montoya, Stephanie Dawson, and Jill Beets (Adelante Development Center/ADC); Jason Quimby (Western New Mexico University/WNMU); Glenn Damian (Northeastern Regional Educational Cooperative/NEREC)

**Guests:** none

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Robin G, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm. Meeting protocol was reviewed. It was established by roll call that a quorum was present. It was a hybrid meeting with council members on Zoom and in person.

Robin G asked for approval of the agenda. Karen W moved to approve the agenda, Brian S seconded, and all council members approved by virtual, and in-person raised hands.

Robin G asked for approval of the draft minutes from October 16, 2023. Karen W moved to approve the minutes, Bill N seconded, and all council members approved by virtual, and in-person raised hands.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A reported that she completed and submitted the Annual Progress Report (APR) for the Federal Fiscal Year 2023 (FFY23). It was approved by the federal Administration for Community Living (ACL). She provided a written comparison chart of the APRs since 2014 with a review of the FFY23 service data. It is available upon request. A few highlights of the first FFY24 quarter (October 2023 – December 2023) were provided, noting that with only two of the three staff members there has been lots of services provided to individuals with disabilities. NMTAP staff provided training for the Conference on Aging (34 attendees) and the NM Technology in Education (TIE) conference (24 attendees). Different subjects have been offered annually at these conferences. Council member Pilar M opened the door and co-presented for a training at the Children’s Law Institute Conference (42 attendees). This was the first time for this group and may provide AT awareness to a new group of individuals. The two AT staff have provided 30 device demonstrations for individuals with disabilities during this quarter. It was noted that device demonstrations are always provided to individuals with disabilities to try several AT devices that could work in accomplishing a needed task and is a primary service under the AT Act. There have been 73 persons who returned loaned AT devices and 68 persons were given AT devices during these three months. It was noted that federal reporting is counted by the devices that are returned in a specified time, versus those newly borrowed. The WNMU Satellite office hired a new student intern, Dulce, who hit the ground running, providing a public awareness event to 13 staff members of the Child Development Center in Silver City. Jason Q, satellite manager, added that she will be traveling to Deming for more outreach and some training in Albuquerque soon. They’re also in the process of setting up the Cap Tel phone for demonstration in the Southwest area of the state. The NEREC Satellite office in Las Vegas hosted the NMTAP staff training for the Hands-On Workshop of AT (HOW-AT). There was a session on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ACC) devices (37 attendees) and one on AT for Reading, Writing and Spelling (21 attendees). Glenn D, satellite manager, noted that most of the Special Education Staff in the area attended and stated that they learned a lot. He also thanked the NMTAP staff for their assistance working with him for students and an AT evaluation he is doing for NMDVR. Robin G noted that NMTAP is also working with DRNM and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to assist NM Human Services Department make their new website accessible.

The need for updated AT equipment in the device loan bank continues to be needed and Lisa M continues to find avenues of funding for this need. The contract with a temporary staffing agency for the Digital Divide Coordinator is nearly done and we hope to get this one-time project going soon. Alice Shriver from Nexus Abilities has inquired to do the contract through the temporary agency. She has a long collaboration relationship with NMTAP.

Tracy A also provided an update on the newly passed 21st Century AT Act regarding the required membership for the council. Karen W, a new member representing a person with a disability that uses AT, was welcomed to the team. The active participation of our current members is important to the NMTAP mission. The membership requirements needs to be updated in the ByLaws. Robin G asked for volunteers to update the ByLaws and Open Meetings Act Resolution for the April 2024 meeting and Karen W volunteered to serve on a special committee.

While the AgrAbility Project is not under the purview of this council, as a partner NMTAP is to provide AT training and AT suggestions for individual food growers as needed. The project has done site assessments for a few farmers lately in collaboration with us for AT. Two training courses by Julie L are in the planning phase for the Spring/Summertime and Tracy A will also provide an outreach presentation to the Navajo Sustainable Agricultural Project, including standard NMTAP services. Julie L will attend the National Workshop Training in March to learn and present a training. Funding for Tracy A to attend as well is in the works.

Lisa M reported information about the financial loans as noted in the next item.

**FINANCIAL LOAN (FundAbility NM) UPDATE:**

Lisa M, GCD Deputy Director, provided an update on the Financial Loan program. Regarding the council requested audit, Stan R, GCD Director, sent the Request for Proposal several months ago to 44 state approved auditors. Only 2 replied that were unable to do it and the others did not reply. The GCD auditor vouched for Manning, who did the SJCI general audits, as an auditor of integrity. Information was also shared regarding possible misappropriations of funds to the NM State Audit Special Investigations Director, Shawn Beck. Conclusive Evidence of Fraud is required. GCD provided information which has not resulted in an investigation. Stan R also had a conversation with Manning regarding the previous audits done for SJCI and stated they have not seen any impropriety or misuse of funds. They did note that in the audit done June 30, 2019, some funds were incorrectly described as “net assets without donor restriction” when they did have “donor restrictions.” SJCI had made that incorrect assumption that the financial loan funds were without restriction. SJCI provided good information to identify proper balances of accounts and the funds identified were returned to the correct assets while the auditors were present. A scope of work requesting an audit was also requested through the State Use Act provider, Horizons, and they did not have a Certified Public Accountant to do the job. It was noted that Adelante has their own auditors and Stan R will work with them to see if they can do an audit of the program. Several council members reiterated their concerns with reports provided to the council that were in disarray, didn’t balance, audits stated no receipts for expenses were provided, the complexity of how the funds moved was confusing, charges for services after the contract with SJCI ended, and that questions to SJCI for clarification were not adequately answered. If any council members feel they have conclusive evidence, please provide it to Lisa M, Deputy Director. GCD is still invested in finding an auditor and will look for other avenues to get one done but wants to transfer the funds before an audit is completed. This will stop the hold on the financial loan program and move forward in serving the community. Lisa M briefly stated that the conversation between GCD, SJCI, and Adelante regarding the transfer of funds continues and a decrease in funds is anticipated due to fees associated with the transfer of bank and investment funds.

Stephanie D, the FundAbility NM Program Manager, stated that they will be reviewing all the current loans as soon as they get the records, and she will speak directly with all the consumers appropriately. Note that some of the loans are 10 years old and may require breaking those contracts. A full review with consumers of their current situations will be done and loans contracts may be changed or updated. Once they receive all the documentation, she will review all the information clearly with the council.

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

Anthony M, reported that in the last quarter the amount of equipment provided to individuals with disabilities continues to increase. The data report was provided to the council prior to the meeting, but it was noted that 257 daily living items and 161 seating/mobility items were given out. As soon as donations are received, they are given out. There is a wait list, sometimes up to 30-40 people. The number of donations received fluctuates all the time and sometimes the equipment is not safe or viable. Conversations between Adelante and NMTAP to possibly extend the service area continue and Adelante is committed to the project. The most frequently requested items are wheelchairs, transport chairs, hospital beds, rollators, and shower chairs. Some of these items are considered luxury items by the health organizations and Robin G reminded everyone that if Medicaid denies equipment, please reach out to DRNM for advocacy first. A doctor’s order is required for power wheelchairs to ensure that they are safe and appropriate to the health of an individual. A few individual stories were shared noting there are frequently tears of gratitude by the consumers.

Jill B noted that DiverseIT gave 40 computers to individuals with disabilities this quarter with the funding provided by NMTAP. The $40,000 that NMTAP provides for the ReUse project through Adelante is split between Back in Use and DiverseIT. Out of the $20,000 for DiverseIT annually, $7000 is invested in parts and $12,000 to pay the staff to do the refurbishing. This limits the capacity for services in the partnership with NMTAP. They also received funding from other partners, such as Comcast, which allowed them to provide a total of 576 computers to the community in the last year. It was noted that the cost to refurbish a computer is about $30 and laptops are preferred with small living quarters often for individuals with disabilities. There is always a shortage of laptops and funding to refurbish them for individuals with disabilities. Both

Back in Use and DiversIT provide other services to offset the funding shortages. They are devoted to the project and the successes of the collaboration this last year were shared. It was noted that other funding Adelante is awarded is often for specific populations or projects, but the collaboration with NMTAP is great.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Robin G noted that the April agenda will include voting on the updated Bylaws and OMA. The Chair and Vice-Chair will have served their 2-year terms this April, so voting for those positions will also be done then. It was requested that council members attend in person unless it is impossible.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:**

Bill N asked to review the outreach to the native pueblos and primarily the Navajo Nation. A discussion was held regarding the many interactions NMTAP has had with the indigenous communities. Several council members noted there is awareness of AT and NMTAP in these communities. The discussion extended into the use of NMTAP device loans for low, mid, and high tech AAC devices or using AT Vendors to borrow high tech devices. Borrowing a device from NMTAP as an independent entity that is not trying to sell a specific high-tech device is most valuable. Participating in a device demonstration of AT from multiple vendors is also key for an unbiased decision that best fits an individual with a disability.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Lisa M noted an article regarding many housing issues for New Mexicans in which Robin G was mentioned.

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on **April 15, 2024, from 1pm – 3pm**. It was suggested that it be held in Silver City at WNMU to allow participation across the state. Robin G again encouraged attendance in person and thanked everyone for attending today. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm.

***Approved by the council 4.15.24***