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, April 15, 2024

Western New Mexico University, Besse-Forward Global Resource Center, 12th Street, Silver City, NM 88062

and Zoom Platform

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

**NMTAP Staff Present**: [In person]: Tracy Agiovlasitis (NMTAP Program Manager); Lisa McNiven (Deputy Director of Governor’s Commission on Disability/GCD); Jesse Armijo (NMTAP AT Coordinator), Julie LaJeunesse (NMTAP AT Specialist)

**NMTAP Partners Present:** [via Zoom]: Anthony Montoya, Stephanie Dawson, and Jill Beets (Adelante Development Center/ADC); [In person]: Jason Quimby (Western New Mexico University/WNMU), Dulce Maria Hererra (WNMU/Student Intern) **Absent:** Glenn Damian (Northeast Regional Education Cooperative/NEREC)

**Guests:** Alice Shriver (NMTAP Digital Divide Coordinator)

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Robin G, Council Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:09 pm. Meeting protocol was reviewed. She noted that the Bylaw revisions were not sent out prior so we will not vote on them today, but we will at the next meeting. It was established by roll call that a quorum was present. It was a hybrid meeting with six council members on Zoom and two in person. See attendance noted above.

Robin G asked for approval of the agenda. Karen W moved to approve the agenda, Dennis C seconded, and all council members approved by roll call.

Robin G asked for approval of the draft minutes from January 22, 2024. Julie B moved to approve the minutes, Karen W seconded, and all council members approved by roll call.

**NMTAP PROGRAM UPDATE:**

Tracy A presented that the staff members have been quite busy in this last quarter. Each of the three AT staff have provided between an average of two to three device demonstrations and several device loans each week. Staff attended several events as well, including a presentation to the Navajo Sustainable Agricultural Project along with Dr. Koukel. Julie L and Tracy A attended the National AgrAbility Workshop along with 400 other professionals and farmers. One of the themes was around mental health and suicide prevention, but others were related to AT specific to food growers with physical disabilities, brain injury, and learning disabilities. The NM AgrAbility Project, along with partners from NM State University, the University of New Mexico, and Mandy’s Farm, did two presentations. This week is packed with events including the Hands-On Workshop of Assistive Technology (HOW-AT), here at WNMU tomorrow from 9am-12pm. One educational session will include low, mid, and high-tech AT for speech and communication and the other will be AT for reading, writing, and spelling. Thank you to Jason Q and Dulce H for getting notice out about that in the whole area including all schools. Then Julie L will present to the NM Department of Agriculture in Las Cruces on Wednesday for both NMTAP and AgrAbility services. Jesse A will provide training for the 2nd Annual Social Services Conference on Thursday for workplace accommodation AT. Friday, Maurice A and Tracy A will be at an informational/AT demonstration table at the 50+ Senior Tech Connect event sponsored by DiverseIT, City of Albuquerque Senior Affairs, and Teeniors. Also in the Fall, we are planning to do some AT training geared toward food growers for vocational rehabilitation professionals, partnering with NMDVR. There may be less frequent AT requests in this area, so we feel this will be valuable.

Alice S was introduced as the Digital Divide Coordinator (DDC) for NMTAP through the one-time federal funding to specifically prepare for future public health challenges. She provided a brief report on her activities related to virtual accessibility, especially in our rural areas. She reported that she is digging into data around broadband and services around the state. As expected, the rural and lower income areas are not well connected and the research can increase services utilizing senior and community programs, along with libraries. Many libraries have carved out areas to provide telehealth services for local areas. Alice is learning about web and virtual accessibility and will expand NMTAP training we are required to provide statewide. This position will end by December and the information compiled will benefit not just NMTAP.

Tracy A invited the AT staff members to add any information. Julie L reiterated the busy schedule and is looking forward to meeting educators, university, or anyone in need of NMTAP services. Jesse A agreed it is nice to be back in the Silver City area with the increase of in-person events. Maurice A noted she is happy to be back in the office after parental leave.

Questions from the Council members were addressed. Andrea S asked and was concerned about how we can help with the food grower suicide prevention in NM. It was noted that one client died by suicide just prior to learning about AgrAbility services in NM. Further discussion noted that continued outreach for AgrAbility services, and increasing collaborations with DWS is vital. Dennis C shared some of his work with DWS in farm worker advocacy. He offered the use of DWS data and joining in his activities, as well as to collaborate with the Luna County Health Council he is on to further outreach. Brian S noted the NM Crisis Hotline’s increase in outreach and the apps created by them for crisis help. NMTAP also has several apps around mental health support and they are available on our website. Tracy A also noted that the NM AgrAbility Project is partnering with the NM Farm and Ranch Museum to have a temporary exhibit potentially for 2 years that is also an extension of outreach. Pilar M said she will visit that exhibit and wondered about a mobile public information trailer for those that are not able to go to the Museum in Las Cruces. This has already been discussed as a possibility by the Museum and Tracy A will share the desire of this council for that.

Lisa M reported some information about the NMTAP budget. She noted that the budget is $596,317 for the state FY24, which includes about $36,000 from the Digital Divide Coordinator (DDC) funds. Note that there will be some DDC funds out of the $80,000 reserved for FY25.The itemized budget is broken into three sections. The beginning balance for personnel was $321,300 and as of December 2023 there was a deficit of $9,072 due to salary/benefit raises. The current deficit will not be available for a few weeks, but funds from other budget areas will be used to cover that deficit. The budget for contractual services includes $42,000 for Back in Use/DiverseIT through Horizons, $25,000 to WNMU, $25,000 to NEREC, $2000 for part of the GCD auditor expense, and $1500 for the NMTAP website. The other miscellaneous costs include rent, travel, and printing. The highest cost in this area is the $53,000 rent where GCD pays up to four months of this expense. The efforts to reduce rent or move to a state-owned building have not been successful. The travel budget began at $1,500 with $2 remaining. The lodging budget began at $1,500 and there is $500 remaining. These balances are all as of December 2023. To increase funding for new AT, the $160,000 request to Representative Heinrich is still pending appropriations. If this is approved, those funds will go to our federal funder, Administration on Community Living. This would not be available until 2025 or 2026. Andrea S asked why the travel to the AT Symposium is not specifically budgeted each year since it is important for the AT program person to attend. Lisa M stated that she will continue to look for travel funds. It was noted that most other AT Programs in the country have additional funding above the AT Act grant funds. Council members offered other possible options to raise additional funds that may or may not be allowable within state government, as well as braided funding with other state agencies that provide services in which AT is important.

Discussion regarding outreach continued, including the need to share our work with senators and representatives to understand the value. Lisa M noted that state employees are not allowed to lobby, but council members can write letters to legislators. Andrea S noted that her doctor said that one in six Americans are over the age of 65 and there is a reduction in births. The need for vital funding to provide AT services will continue to increase. Statistics gathered by the DDC may be helpful in this area. Accessible buildings, housing, and spaces were also discussed by council members. Pilar T suggested that advice on who to notify in cities regarding potential ADA non-compliance issues in public parks be posted on the website. Dennis C noted that he does housing inspections for farm workers and Robin G noted that DRNM is available to help with accommodations for disabilities if needed. He will bring that attention to the DWS team.

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

Lisa M, GCD Deputy Director, provided an update on the transfer of funds from SJCI to ADC. The Access Loan accounts are being transferred to ADC. ADC has established accounts at the Four Corners Community Bank (FCCB), and the SJCI accounts are being transferred to ADC accounts. The FCCB is facilitating the transfers. ADC is keeping the Certificates of Deposits at FCCB. The Morgan Stanley accounts are being transferred to ADC. Adelante’s auditor is monitoring the funds transfer. I don’t have a completion date currently, but I expect closure within a couple of weeks. Auditor Manning is conducting their annual audit currently, and we hope to have a report at a future meeting.

Stephanie D reported that they have started their marketing plan for FundAbility.

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

Anthony M, reported that they continue to provide many wheelchairs, rollators, and standers for all ages. Motorized wheelchairs and scooters are also provided in accordance with weight requirements. On average three to eight motorized wheelchairs are provided a month, but it all depends on if they are donated. 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.

ADC added a new program, Destination Accessibility, in February to help bring in funds to support Back In Use through a grant from Visit Albuquerque. This program will rent wheelchairs, scooter, and rollators to New Mexico visitors or seniors with mobility challenges to navigate local sites or events. They rented equipment at the recent Chocolate and Coffee Fest with success, including individuals utilizing Back In Use services after the event. Tracy A will share her prior experience with similar rentals soon to further enhance the project. Council members discussed curb cuts and other accessibility issues within cities that are frustrating for persons with disabilities. Anthony M noted the need for a curb cut to the City of Albuquerque personnel in charge of that. He stated that he gets close to 200 requests a day for that. Pilar T asked what the position of GCD is regarding accessibility in public parks. A discussion on whether GCD can do a site review of a park that is inaccessible to individuals with disabilities was held and Lisa M suggested that individuals directly make a request to the city that owns the park. It was clearly noted that GCD is not an enforcement agency, but it was unclear of a procedure to request support from GCD to bring awareness of inaccessibility to a public area. It was noted that the process with each city is not clear or responsive, such as calling 311 in Albuquerque or the city’s Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, and it was suggested that guidance be included on the website.

Jill B noted that DiverseIT gave 45 computers to individuals with disabilities this quarter for a value of almost $12,000. That is equivalent to about $260 a computer not including staff time, or parts purchased to refurbish the computers. Much of the expenses in both DiverseIT and Back In Use are covered by other funding. Overall, there is about an eight-fold return on the investment of $40,000 by NMTAP. The commitment to these two programs is the reason that ADC continues to be part of the ReUse obligation for NMTAP under the AT Act.

She shared a story of an individual’s happiness with the computer set up provided by DiverseIT.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Robin G noted that the council leadership was voted in two years ago during a meeting held prior to the designated meeting for this action. The full council agreed to wait to address any change in leadership at the October meeting as designated in the Bylaws. The leadership present agreed to wait.

**COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS:** none

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:** none

**ADJOURN:**

The next NMTAP Advisory Council meeting will be on **July 22, 2024, from 1pm – 3pm** with location TBD. The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm.

***Approved 7.22.24***