Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)

Date: September 11, 2024

Commission: Becky Davis, Director; Amber Carter

Task Force Members in Attendance:

• Chip Hailey (in person)

• Mary Hale (in person)

• Stephanie Birkhead (virtual)

• Amy Rowson (virtual)

• Beth Jordan (virtual)

Absent:

• Scott Dollar, TF member.

Audience:

- Erica Walz
- Kim Vaughn
- Lydia Olmsted
- Andrea Silver

1. Call to Order

• The public meeting was called to order by Becky Davis at 11:26 a.m.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes

• The minutes from the previous meeting were approved. It was noted that MCDHH Commission minutes tended to be less detailed and a brief summary report can be given for those seeking more in-depth information and these records are held for public view. Taskforce minutes have been very detailed, but can be more direct to what is being discussed.

3. DEAF, Inc.

• Sarah Prechtel and Delinda Brite from DEAF, Inc. were absent. It was mentioned that Deaf Inc. might be interested in taking over the program, potentially starting in January 2025. They are aware of the involved parties and community members.

4. Task Force Updates

• Revisit Addition of SSP to Taskforce: Recommendations for SSP representation are to be submitted via email to Becky Davis by next week. Sarah Kurtz was recommended as a choice to consider. This could mean two SSP representatives chosen.

5. End of Year Survey

Vancro EOY report. Good information, but not sure if anyone here who has received training should be seeing that information.

6. Meeting Virtual Attendance of Public

A question was asked whether people who are interested in the audience can attend remotely, or is the TF only able to join?

It was felt that as those attending the meeting in the audience are there to observe primarily and that opening virtual platform to the public could cause disruption to the running of the meeting, even though it would be a great idea. This might be something available down the road.

7. Bid and RFP Updates:

• The need for a new public bid and potential changes to the current RFP were discussed. The authority to make changes within the existing budget constraints was confirmed. The current vendor will continue until December 31st.

• RFP Modifications:

Concerns were raised about the classification of services as direct or indirect. There was feedback indicating the need for clearer guidance on these classifications. Inconsistencies in categorizing scheduling and training were noted.

• Funding Allocation:

A discrepancy in the reported funding amount was identified. It was suggested to adjust the scholarship fund and reallocate resources to better support the program. History on the Scholarship funds was shared. Discussion regarding funds available to families of DB children ensued.

8. Consumer/Community Engagement:

Becky reported that she has been contacted by several community members interested in what is going on with the SSP program. Becky mentioned that Lydia Olmsted has set up a group for individuals, for information-sharing purposes. Lydia addressed the group briefly stating she is exploring some possibilities and have reached out to many DB and SSPs to gauge interest in advocating for more funding with the legislature, noting the election might pose challenges. Ideally, those interested would coordinate a time to meet at the Capitol to showcase the work SSPs do and its empowering impact.

If members know of anyone who should be involved, please email or text her. She is working on formally organizing something and have contacted Vancro to obtain specific data from previous agency records."

Next Steps:

Additional funding options will be explored, and an email will be sent to initiate discussions with other projects.

The meeting reconvened at 1:15 p.m. after a lunch break.

9. Discussion Points

• Scholarship Funding and Staffing:

The team discussed reallocating scholarship funding to enhance direct services. It was suggested that a full-time program worker might be more effective than a part-time one due to the time required for scheduling.

• Concerns were raised about the adequacy of funding for staffing roles such as program management, training, and scheduling. The professional salary benchmark in Missouri is around $42,000, though actual pay may vary. The team will assess whether the current funding is sufficient and consider adjusting expectations or allocations.

• Training Specifics:

The team proposed setting a minimum of 8 hours for training, including at least 2 hours of hands-on training. Training should involve both blind and sighted co-trainers to ensure quality. One-on-one sessions should be emphasized, and online training should supplement, not replace, in-person training. Also, an exam be written for one-on-one candidates, must pass before certified.

• Professional Conduct and Reimbursement:

Concerns were raised about SSPs' use of cell phones during assignments and the need for clearer language regarding professional conduct and background screenings. Transportation and mileage reimbursement were also discussed, focusing on fair compensation for travel expenses and incorporating these costs into the budget.

10. RFP and Funding Discussions

A revised RFP is planned to be ready by October 1st. The RFP will be split into sections with specific deadlines for feedback and revisions. Information provided by current vendor will be used to make changes for the program coverage for the remainder of the 2025 fiscal year.

• The need for updated data on consumer numbers and regional demand to make informed decisions about funding and program adjustments was acknowledged.

• The new RFP FY2026 is planned to start July 1, 2025. Discussions are ongoing about extending the program's duration and revising language to clarify the program's full length. Becky discussed potentially revising the RFP to cover the 2026 Fiscal Year.

11. Legislative Efforts and Funding

Becky is exploring legislative options for increasing the program's budget beyond $300,000 and is seeking a legislator to sponsor an amendment. Concerns about the time required for new legislation or amendments and their impact on program funding and continuity were discussed. If approved for increase this year, expansion of funding would begin FY2027 (July 1, 2026).

12. Meeting Scheduling

• The next meeting is scheduled for November 13, 2024. It was agreed that regular meetings will be held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month starting in 2025.

13. Public Input and Testimonies

• The audience emphasized the importance of the SSP program and discussed alternative funding sources. It was suggested to gather testimonies to support legislative efforts. Amber Carter will assist in collecting testimonies for legislative support.

14. Additional Discussion and Public Comment

Concerns about the flexibility of SSP hours and the Use or Lose policy

Public comment included the option of funding to have a donation capacity so the SSP Program fund could receive donations. The SSP Program supports the basic functions of daily life. Idea of allowing use of Uber if an SSP could not drive.

165. Action Items

Invitations to future meetings in 2025 and 2026 (with Links)

Contact Jane Herder to discuss funding options.

Review and provide feedback on RFP modifications.

Confirm updated funding figures and correct any discrepancies.

Becky will send out the Vancro EOY report and other relevant documents.

Becky will inquire about detailed funding and expense information from Vancro.

Becky will update the RFP and communicate with DESE regarding the program's future.

Amber Carter will assist in collecting testimonies for legislative support; development of form or input option or information

SSP Representation on the taskforce

Service Providers Present:

Sydney Johnson

Corinne Glaus

Randi Eisenhauer

Nicole Niles

Amy Sue Guinn

Christina Godinez

Aaron Smith

Christina Burns

The meeting was adjourned at 4:09 p.m.