**GENERAL MEMBER MEETING
7.21.21 via WebEx**

**Topic:** “The Disability Rights NC Contribution to Our Social Safety Net”

**Guest Speakers:** Tadra Martin, R. Larkin Taylor-Parker, Luke Woollard from Disability Rights NC

**PRESENT.** Laura Cockman, Kevin Robertson, Nancy Warren, Ann Elmore, Tadra Martin, Pam Palmer, John Maron, Stephanie Bias, Laura Schlabach, Autumn Cox, Allison Crossman, Angela Ellis, Aletha Taylor-Jones, Billie Council, Kathi Graham, Brittany Hughes, Elizabeth Kressman, Diane Trainor, Heather Magill, Leo Bohland, Nourhan Mansour, Kris O’Keefe-McKusker, Jonanne Otuonye, Stacy Ferrell, Taylor Shelton, Greg Tanner, Sandra Deutsch, Sharrone Robinson, Shauna Allen-Smith

**CALL TO ORDER**. Our meeting was called to order by Laura Cockman, Chair.

This meeting was hosted via WebEx, scheduled by Kevin Robertson. We are thankful for him help setting up this virtual meeting and posting the meeting agenda for us.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES.** Laura Schlabach presented the minutes from the annual meeting and annual conference from May 19, 2021 for approval. A motion to approve was made by Ann Elmore and seconded by Pam Palmer. All agreed and with no further discussion the motion carried to pass the meeting minutes from May 19th.

**TREASURER’S REPORT.** Pam Palmer presented the treasurer’s report:
Total Balance as of 7/21/21 - $15,991.01
Reserve - $3,000
Remaining balance after reserve - $12,991.01
Membership dues – $610 from last year
Conference Sponsors $6,500
Total income last year - $7,110

John Maron made a motion to approve the Treasurer’s Report, which was seconded by Autumn Cox. All agreed and the motion passed to approve the Treasurer’s Report.

Ann introduced today’s speakers from Disability Rights NC (DRNC) and their contribution to Elder Abuse:
Tadra Martin is the supervising attorney with NC Disability Rights and supervises the intake team.
Luke Woollard – Attorney focused on rights for individuals with disabilities in the criminal justice system
R. Larkin Taylor-Parker– Attorney with a focus on guardianships for individuals with a disability.

Tadra shared the background behind how DRNC started. DRNC began as part of the American Disabilities Act and provides advocacy, policy work, support and protection for individuals with disabilities. Initially, DRNC was a part of the Governor’s Office but they later opted to become a separate entity to offer better advocacy. Their main goal is to investigate complaints of abuse or neglect for individuals with disabilities and to offer them support and community resources.

Tadra shared how her team handles intake referrals and identifies targets and explained that teams work together to develop goals, seek community input and accomplish each target. She also shared that DRNC also shares similar interests and practices with Legal Aid of NC: Eligibility, Practice Areas, Geographic Services. Tadra explained that DRNC and Legal Aid NC often both assist the same clients and make referrals if the client does not meet needs of the office.

Tadra also informed the group that if any agency, such as APS, should contact her intake team to make a referral. Folk may contact her team via phone or by completing an online application.

R. Larkin Taylor-Parker shared that Guardianship/Conservatorships is a legal arrangement and state law matter that varies slightly from state to state. The main goal is that major “life decisions” is taken by the court system from one person to another person. Guardianship does not necessarily mean that there will be financial support, housing, protection from going to jail or getting sued, protection from making bad decisions, getting harmed or staying out of trouble. Guardianship sometimes opens a vehicle for victims who are getting abuse or neglected.

Guardianship is one of the most severe restrictive measures on civil rights for individuals, especially for those with disabilities. For most folks, less restrictive alternatives are more appropriate for individuals, but the general public is not educated very much about this topic. Folks with intellectual disabilities or mental health issues often “make bad decisions” which others might consider would be grounds for a Guardianship. “Normal” folks are entitled to make bad decisions, but folks with disabilities aren’t necessarily entitled to this “freedom.” Larkin shared that Guardianships are overused throughout the US and in NC. Due to the current conversations surrounding Brittany Spears’s Conservatorship, Guardianship could be a topic on the verge of reform. Larkin believes that folks should consider if there are alternative options before considering Guardianship, because it is so highly overused.

Larkin also shared that Guardianship paperwork is available at the county courthouse and open to the public. However, it could be a challenge to track down the original paperwork if a client has moved around frequently.

Luke Woollard shared that his role at DRNC involves advocacy efforts for all justice-involved people with disabilities, from first interaction with law enforcement to rejoining communities after incarceration. His team also monitors all prison systems in NC – both state and federal systems. Luke added that people with disabilities, especially mental health disabilities and substance use issues, are increasingly at higher risk for violent interactions with the police. His team suggests that special crisis intervention training for police offers is offered to help de-escalate situations. Currently, only 40% of law enforcement is trained in crisis prevention; however, his team suggests that this training is offered universally.

Another solution, the STAR Program, is an alternative response team organized with EMTs and mental health professionals who respond, not armed police. The goal of de-escalation of the situation is to prevent further escalation and to divert people in crisis from jail by connecting them with community resources. Hi team advocates, monitors and supports individuals with disabilities during all interactions in the justice system. His team is currently working on advocacy efforts, such as adopting new standards for solitary confinement, because studies show that solitary confinement can worsen an individual’s mental health state or cause an individual to decompensate during this time.

Post-release, his team works with individuals before and after their release, because often they are released without any connection to local resources. Luke shared his team has a long list of resources and contacts available for post-release individuals and rejoining in their community. Luke provided his contact information, should anyone need to touch base with him for additional resources.

Tadra with the Education Committee shared that Shevel Mavins for “Ignoring, is not an option: Addiction is a growing problem with the elderly, but worth tackling.”

Nancy Warren with the Advocacy Committee shared that they continue to work with colleagues regarding funding and legislation: NC Coalition on Aging and the Elder Justice Coalition. While we are still waiting to hear more details regarding the Governor’s Budget, APS is excited about the recent increase in federal monies to support their programs. The NCPAAA also continues to engage at the local level with APS and DAAS.

Stephanie Bias with the Awareness Committee shared that her agency recently had an “in-person” event in Charlotte at the Kiwanis Club. She shared that her advocacy efforts, recently back to being in-person, have been a great asset for older adults. She shared that “robo-scam calls” seemed to be the biggest complaint for folks in the areas she has travelled to. Her biggest advice is to safeguard your personal information and disengage if folks are trying to pry for such. She and John Maron continue to update the Consumer Fraud Task Force on a regular basis.

John Maron shared an update for the HelpVul Project, which includes the APS groups to make community referrals to the portal. The portal was originally designed for other agencies to submit a referral to APS, but now the portal allows APS to make referrals directly. His group is attempting to include the Assistant District Attorneys, the US Postal Services and Law Enforcement, to incorporate more agencies in the community. He and Ann Elmore continue to offer educational opportunities to those who are interested in learning more about the project. Nancy suggested that his team submit a proposal for a workshop at the yearly conference regarding the project. John agreed and said he would check with his team.

Autumn just posted a link on the website with updated information from today’s slides and additional resources from today’s meeting. We would like to welcome Allison Crossman to the Communications Committee.

Kevin Robertson shared that it is time to send in your member dues and you may due so electronically or by check to the PO Box. Even though Pam has moved out of state, she continues to assist as the Treasurer and he and Laura S. continue to check the mailbox and work to deposit the checks.

Laura C. reminded the group that our next general meeting was on Wednesday, September 15, 2021 and our speaker will be Shevel Mavins. John Maron motioned to adjourn the meeting and Stephanie Bias seconded the motion. All agreed and with that the motion passed to end the meeting.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.
Respectfully Submitted by

Laura Schlabach, Secretary