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**Disability Awareness Resource Team (DART)  
Meeting Minutes  
November 12, 2024**

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**CALL TO ORDER** – DART Co-Chair, John Fiore called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. at the Upjohn Institute, 300 S. Westnedge Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Sharmese Anderson (FwD) <sup>✓</sup>

John Fiore (MRS)

Sydney Kroll (BSBP)

Kathy Lentz (ISKzoo) <sup>✓</sup>

Alvin Littel (KRESA)

Ramona Lumpkin (Recovery Inst) <sup>✓</sup>

Michelle Miller Adams (Upjohn)

Kathy Olsen (MWSW)

Becky Springett (VB CMH)

Lisa Stanley (MRS BSP) <sup>✓</sup>

Sen Toda (MCTI)

Kathleen Wine (Goodwill SWMI)

<sup>✓</sup> Attended virtually

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The DART meeting agenda for November 12, 2024 was approved by consensus of members present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The DART meeting minutes of September 17, 2024 were approved by consensus of members present.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Members present in-person and online introduced themselves.

**2025 MEETING CALENDAR**

The proposed meeting calendar included meeting dates on both Tuesdays and Thursdays and the week of the month varied for each of the meetings.

**Members present approved the DART 2025 meeting calendar as presented.**

**AGENCY UPDATES**

*Upjohn Institute Research* – Michelle Miller-Adams reported a focus of her current research is on disability employment. As a parent of a youth with a disability, access to services for individuals with disabilities is important to her. She noted that an advocacy issue for the Michigan Developmental Disability Council Committee is exploring the possibility of an alternative diploma to address the high school graduation rate.

*MI Career Technical Institute (MCTI)* – Sen Toda reported the Director of the MI Career Technical Institute (MCTI) has retired and they are in the process of filling the position. Currently MCTI offers training for twelve trade programs. For the Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) Training, MCTI partners with other organizations in Kalamazoo and Benton Harbor.

*Van Buren Community Mental Health* – Becky Springett reported she works at Van Buren Mental Health and works with organizations for job placements for her customers.

*Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP)* – Sydney Kroll reported her work focuses on vocational rehab counseling at the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP).

*KRESA Transition Coordinator* - Alvin Little reported services he provides are available to all KRESA high school students with documented disabilities. A challenge is coordinating the many services, and he has spent a lot of time updating a list of agencies and resources. A personal goal of his is to restart a transition network where agencies and school districts gather to share information and resources. There is also an annual Transition Fair; and 29 vendors and 70 parents/community members are expected to attend the upcoming event. Additional information regarding KRESA's Transition Services can be found on the KRESA website at <https://www.kresa.org/domain/58>.

*Recovery Institute* – Ramona Lumpkin reported the Recovery Institute offers peer support to individuals who have mental health and/or substance use concerns. She noted that the recovery process is often strengthened with peer support. Services are provided in a group setting, through classes, one-on-one, and through social outings. Services can be accessed via walk-in appointments as well as referrals. Recovery Institute can invoice insurance for covered expenses and there are also many services that are offered at no charge. The calendar of events is available on the Recovery Institute website at <https://www.recoverymi.org/ri-calendar>.

*Goodwill Industries Southwestern Michigan* – Kathleen Wine reported that Goodwill Industries Southwestern Michigan offers rehabilitation services, financial coaching, financial literacy, resource navigation, and voucher assistance. They also have a HELP line (269-422-0327) that consumers can call or text for assistance. For the vocational rehabilitation services, Goodwill partners with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP).

*Integrated Services Kalamazoo (ISKzoo)* – Kathy Lentz reported the Recovery Institute's peer to peer services previously reported on is a critical piece to recovery. The Action Employment Team at Integrated Services Kalamazoo supports employment for anyone with a mental health condition and her agency has contracts with other organizations such as MRC Industries and Community Living Options for these services. They also partner with MRS and MRC Industries to braid funding to help individuals be successful.

*Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)* – John Fiore reported Michigan Rehabilitation Services is a State Agency that provides services to individuals with disabilities to help them prepare for, find, and keep employment. There is an increased focus on obtaining credentials and training to advance individuals in careers. MRS works with customers to create individual plans for employment and helps to build confidence to support each individual's job goal by looking at what services and support each person needs. MRS partners with many other organizations, including Michigan Works! Southwest, to provide services and support.

*Friends with Disabilities* – Sharmese Anderson reported Friends with Disabilities provides services to individuals with physical disabilities who are age 18 and older. They provide

activities such as events and short trips to help bridge isolation. Past events included a Bronson healthy cooking class, and trips to Cedar Point and Chicago Navy Pier.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

John Fiore reported that the DART co-chairs and staff are looking to committee members for agenda topics and/or speakers for future DART meetings. Members shared some suggestions, as well as ideas as to how to get more business involvement. One idea was to have one or two meetings with a business focus and to invite representatives from champion employers that support hiring individuals with disabilities. Potential content for the meeting could include a presentation from the MRS business network on workplace accommodations. Other meeting topics that were suggested included labor market information regarding in-demand and growing occupations in the Southwest Michigan area.

Another suggestion was to send out a brief survey to members to gather feedback regarding the DART meeting format, as well as potential program topics for future meetings. Michelle Miller-Adams offered to assist with the survey.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

Michelle Miller-Adams noted that during her research she noticed that there is an extensive list of agencies that provide numerous services. However, it is very confusing as to what agency to contact, and that often parents discover resources accidentally. Another member noted the importance of educating parents sooner than later, especially before their child reaches the age of sixteen.

Kathy Lentz asked members if they would please review the Integrated Services Kalamazoo website <https://iskzoo.org/> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/kazoocmh/> and provide feedback and suggestions for improvement to her via email at [klentz@iskzoo.org](mailto:klentz@iskzoo.org).

Members requested more information regarding the Employer Resource Network®. It was noted that ERNs® are private-public associations whose purpose is improving workforce retention through employee support and training. ERN® membership is open to private sector employers, as well as non-profits. More information is available on the Michigan Works! Southwest website at <https://www.michiganworkssouthwest.org/employers/employer-resource-network>.

## **EMERGING ISSUES RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT & ADVOCACY**

One member mentioned a Southwest Michigan group that provides a Certificate of Completion endorsement for strong attendance as well as strong behaviors and skills that businesses would find to be beneficial. Alvin Littel offered to explore this model.

## **UNIQUE CUSTOMER NEEDS**

Discussion occurred regarding preparing students for competitive employment. A few members noted that they are seeing a trend that many students are not getting work-based learning (WBL) in their teenage years, and those who are participating in WBL do not have the mental and physical endurance for full-time employment. The lack of soft skills was also a concern. John Fiore reported that MRS is trying to do more with WBL and offers a summer paid work experience. He encouraged agencies to make referrals to MRS early in the calendar year so that they are not scrambling in June for placements. Members also discussed a potential partnership for transportation assistance.

Members also discussed the need for young people to have better life management skills. Often agencies put faith in parents to observe and teach; however, many families do not have the skills to do this. Members also shared ideas regarding a model where students could live on a college campus for a couple of weeks prior to a freshman year in college. Sydney Kroll reported that BSBP has a college prep program where students live on campus during the summer to get an idea of what independent living would be like.

**COLLABORATION – Partner Matrix** – Kathy Olsen requested that members review the partner matrix and to let her know if they have any updates to their agency's listing.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

John Fiore referred members to the list of professional development opportunities that were listed on the agenda. Kathy Olsen added that the Michigan Works! Association also offers professional development opportunities. The professional development opportunities were:

- Disability Network Southwest Michigan <http://www.dnswm.org/>
- KPL ONEplace <https://www.kpl.gov/oneplace/>
- The Synergy Health Center <https://synergykzoo.org/>
- Incompass Michigan – <https://incompassmi.org/> - see the Education & Training tab
- DART Desktop Training Modules  
<https://www.michiganworkssouthwest.org/resources/at-your-desktop-training>
- Michigan Works! Association Professional Development  
<https://www.michiganworks.org/professional-development>

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

KRESA will be hosting their Transition Network on Thursday, November 14, 2024 at the Kalamazoo RESA Service Center from 8:00-10:00 a.m.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next DART meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 13, 2025, from 2:00-4:00 p.m.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Kathy Olsen, Quality Assurance/Project Coordinator and WDB Liaison  
Michigan Works! Southwest