

**Alaska Statewide Independent Living Council, Inc.  
Quarterly Meeting**

**LOCATION**

Videoconference

**DATE**

April 30, 2021

MEETING MINUTES

Prepared by: Paula DiPaolo  
Peninsula Reporting

*Friday, April 30, 2021*

**Council Members Present:**

Ric Nelson, Chair  
Tristan Knutson-Lombardo  
Nona Safra  
Irma Goodwine  
Doug Toelle  
Jim Kreatschman  
Wendi Shanks  
Doreen Leavitt  
Jessica Chapman

**Council Members Absent:**

Anthony Newman  
Emilie Woodward

**Guests:**

Joyanna Geisler  
Joan O'Keefe  
Denice Gilroy  
Eric Gurley  
Brigit Barstad  
Eric Boyer  
John Tracy  
Katey Redmond  
Malan Paquette  
Beverly Cole  
Lisa Morley  
Maggie Winston  
Jessie Doherty  
Dean Sundmark  
Jetta Whittaker

**Staff:**

Michael Christian, Executive Director  
Kathy Munk, Administrative Assistant

**Court Reporter:**

Lenny DiPaolo, RPR, CRR, CCP

**CALL TO ORDER – 9:00 a.m.**

**ROLL CALL – Quorum Established**

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

Doug Toelle **MOVED** to approve the consent agenda, **SECONDED** by Tristan Knutson-Lombardo. Hearing no objections, the motion **PASSED**, and the consent agenda was approved as presented.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Michael Christian opened up an opportunity for members of the SILC to introduce themselves.

## **INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER (ILC) UPDATE**

Joyanna Geisler introduced herself and stated that ILC serves the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, and the Valdez/Cordova census area. ILC is also an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) as well as a Developmental Disability Resource Connection (DDRC).

Joyanna explained that ILC's estimated agency budget for this year is around \$1.35 million dollars; \$442,000 of which comes directly from IL funds through state general funds, federal Part B and Part C funds, and CARES Act funding.

ILC has four offices with 17 staff, and all staff have returned to working in the office, although they are still closed to the public. Meetings with individuals can take place in the person's home or by limited in-office appointments following safety protocols and policies. Joyanna noted that transitioning back into the office has been harder for some people than others, but they are trying to establish who they are again as a Center for Independent Living (CIL) and working together.

Some highlights since July 2020 include:

- IL services provided to 666 consumers
- 243 people received ADRC services
- 138 people received services through the DDRC.

Joyanna Geisler reported that she has been serving on the City of Homer ADA Compliance Committee for approximately four or five years. They have developed a transition plan for the City of Homer, and they are now providing oversight for the implementation of that.

Joyanna reported that there was a Kenai Peninsula Borough-wide voting stakeholder's group that met for about six to eight months some time back. A few years ago they recommended a hybrid vote-by-mail voting system, which was recalled in a ballot initiative. What has since happened is that the borough is

purchasing ten accessible voting machines for various voting places on the Kenai Peninsula.

Joyanna Geisler stated that one of the newer programs of ILC that they are very proud of is the Veterans Options for Independence, Choice, and Empowerment (VOICE) program, which is a partnership with the Alaska VA and a financial management system where eligible veterans manage their own budgets issued by the Alaska VA. The eligible veterans must meet the nursing facility level of care that the VA provides, and this program keeps veterans at home and out of restricted settings like nursing homes and assisted living homes. Since July they have worked with 52 veterans across the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak, and Valdez

Joyanna reported that ILC is in the process of interviewing students for the summer work program they are trying to facilitate in Kenai, Soldotna, Homer and Kodiak. Thanks to some different funding opportunities, they are also ramping up their assistive technology and are partnering closely with Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA) to get demonstration kits and other assistive technology to loan out to elders and people with disabilities.

Joyanna stated that ILC has received CARES Act funding directly from the Administration on Community Living and through a contract with Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL). With those funds, they have developed a CARES Act Consumer Services Fund for purchases including:

- Transportation vouchers to go to medical appointments or vaccines.
- The purchase of a stair lift for an elder due to balance issues from wearing a mask for COVID protocol.
- Home therapy equipment for a child unable to attend therapy services during the pandemic.
- Phone and internet for a veteran who was unable to communicate and speak so ILC could maintain communication with him via text.
- Individual with hearing and vision loss contracted COVID, and their hearing was diminished even further, so the funding helped pay the co-pay for new hearing aids.
- The purchase of a side-by-side trike for an individual with autism who was no longer able to maintain their weight by going to the gym.

Joyanna stated that another project of ILC is vegetable and flower starts that they will be giving out in the next couple of weeks to consumers.

## ACCESS ALASKA UPDATE

Eric Gurley stated that Access Alaska serves four major areas that include Anchorage, Fairbanks, Mat-Su, and also the Kenai area for personal care services only. Access also covers rural areas, in particular the North Slope regions 1 and 7. Services were paused with COVID.

Eric stated that they are anticipating starting to fully occupy their offices in the month of May and will be offering small group settings. Offices have been sparsely occupied since January, and they have not engaged in any group activities whatsoever. They are hoping to start small and maintain the COVID mitigation strategies. They are also starting to look at traveling again and providing services to the North Slope.

Eric Gurley stated that they are getting excited about the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program and reinvigorating relationships with the local community business owners in Fairbanks to see what their status is in terms of coming back out of COVID.

Eric reported that Access's major activities in terms of consumer impact have been relegated to peer support and utilizing a model of virtual presence. Access offers 14 different types of peer support groups that were isolated to their regional offices, and now they have seven active statewide peer support groups where people can call in and attend virtually. They anticipate there will not be a complete extinction of those types of opportunities post-pandemic, because some people find the distance format suits their needs better than an in-person setting. In the last quarter, Access Alaska saw a 40 percent increase in peer support, and he is hoping to see that continue with no loss of peer support involvement through the reoccupation of their facility.

Eric Gurley stated that construction on their new Fairbanks building has been completed, so they will start a slow occupation of that setting. They are looking to start partnering with local partners in the area to be able to utilize the area for meetings, et cetera. The building has an accessible shower with an adult changing station available for those in need, and it has a large meeting space. They also anticipate being able to use their parking area for outreach such as fairs and other opportunities.

Access Alaska has also engaged in outreach during COVID through virtual opportunities. There were a lot of information and referral calls related to mental health support. Access has started a relationship with Alaska Careline as well as

the Crisis Now group, which is developing the mental health response teams out of Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su. They are also working with Wall Busters to invigorate a legislative opportunity to connect utilizing Access's space to broker community-based discussions with the local Interior legislators for consumers to have more opportunity to engage directly.

Eric Gurley reported that their plans for the next quarter are to continue developing the Fairbanks Community Center through the summer so it is fully realized and in play by the fall. One of his top tier goals is to figure out a way to get a presence back into the rural area. Some of their smaller communities have not accepted any travel, and he is also unsure how to have a level of comfort traveling to rural Alaska when there are lots of concerns about vaccinations. He noted that a lot of Access' staff have chosen to get vaccinated because they understand the effect on their ability to meet with and serve people.

### **ARCTIC ACCESS UPDATE**

Denice Gilroy started her presentation by thanking SAIL for sharing the CARES Act funds they received. Arctic Access was able to support approximately 187 people with COVID-related issues such as utility bills, phone bills, internet access, computers, and rental assistance. She had the ability to support people in ways that no other programs were supporting people in the rural areas.

Denice stated that she wrote a Heat Crisis Assistance grant, and was able to get \$46,000 and served 130 consumers. Those 130 consumers received such things as Toyo stoves, parts and supplies, diesel fuel, electric bill payments; and the funding helped to divert health crises, structural home damages, and they were able to keep people in the region warm. The provision of this funding allowed people to use their PFDs and stimulus money for other items needed in their homes that Arctic Access was unable to provide.

Denice Gilroy shared that she and her education director are gearing up for Pre-ETS, and they currently have 25 youth signed up. They also have nine youth currently in a diversion program, supported by Pre-ETS funding, that participate in a go-to-work program. If a student is at risk for dropping out, this program allows them to go to work if they show up for school. The project supports youth with learning such skills as resume writing, completing applications, and finding jobs. These nine youth are looking towards graduating.

Denice asked for the meeting attendees to support the ramp grant through the Mental Health Trust, and she also explained the importance of having an ADRC in

her region. She stated that she receives \$183,000 in ILC funds, which she is able to do a lot with, but it's getting harder and harder to accomplish the tasks she needs to do. In addition to the ILC funds, she also received \$50,000 for Pre-ETS, and again, the Heat Crisis grant was \$46,000. Right now she has 395 unduplicated new consumers and has had 738 consumers in all by the third quarter of this fiscal year.

Denice Gilroy showed a presentation to the meeting attendees demonstrating the partnership that Arctic Access has established with Jill Peters, the education director, utilizing funding through Pre-ETS. She stated that with that funding they offer such programs as Discovery, work study, and paid summer internships. Jill Peters also goes into the school five times per week and teaches job readiness skills. The presentation included photos of youth in Nome participating in Pre-ETS employment activities with some of those youth heading into the military. She also shared a newspaper article about the 35 youth that were supported in employment through the Pre-ETS program in Nome through partnerships with ten local businesses. Some photos demonstrated activities at the Job Club, while other showed Pre-ETS graduates in professional jobs they obtained after graduation.

Nona Safra commented that she is working with a group to save Leonhard Seppala's house in Nome, and she asked if Arctic Access could be enlisted to helping with that. Denice Gilroy replied that yes, absolutely. Some of the youth in her program have learned some phenomenal construction skills.

### **SOUTHEAST ALASKA INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) UPDATE**

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo shared that he is currently the CIL representative on the SILC, but he will be rotating off as soon as the Governor and Boards and Commissions are back to appointing people to boards. He is currently part time with SAIL now.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo reported that SAIL recently hired Deb Ethridge, former deputy director and former acting director for the Division of Senior & Disabilities Services. She took a couple-year gap working for Optum Health, and now she is SAIL's assistant director.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo reported that SAIL serves Yakutat to Metlakatla, and they are also the ADRC and DDRC for the Southeast region. They maintain staff in six locations with Juneau being the main office. Other offices are located in Haines, Ketchikan, Sitka, Prince of Wales Island in Klawock, and a part-time staff as part of a contract with the Organized Village of Kake. They are also looking at adding another person or two in a couple of other communities.

Tristan noted that their biggest challenge in Southeast is that they are not connected by any roads, so it is expensive to provide services. The best services they can provide are the ones where they have trusted, known community members in a community that can connect with people with disabilities and seniors/elders in making sure they are meeting the needs in each of the really unique and diverse towns and villages of the region.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo reported that for this state fiscal year thus far they have served just under 800 consumers. The state and federal funding they receive as a center is about 16 to 17 percent of their total agency budget. Their yearly budget is approximately \$2.5 million, so they work aggressively to leverage that IL funding to expand and deepen the services they can provide.

In terms of staff updates, in addition to the recent hire of Deb Etheridge, they have created the new position of employment specialist and VOICE program at the Juneau office. They are also hiring a new program director for Sitka.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo stated that SAIL has stepped up and taken a lead role in some of the disaster organization and relief efforts after the Haines mudslide. The majority of people affected are SAIL consumers and are disproportionately seniors and people with disabilities.

Tristan reported the sad news of the passing of a recently retired staff member from Ketchikan who was killed in a hit and run accident. As a result, SAIL has been working with the Ketchikan city and borough on some safety measures around that crosswalk and others to hopefully prevent future accidents.

Tristan acknowledged that it is legislative season, so Hill visits were conducted in January and February in collaboration with a variety of other groups such as AgeNet, Key Coalition, Foraker Group, as well as on behalf of the SILC. It was great to have staff involved, and they see it as an important advocacy opportunity, particularly since SAIL has staff in Juneau. They typically like to be there in person during non-pandemic times.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo reported that all the ADRCs received some assistive technology money in partnership with ATLA, so it's been great to do ongoing staff training around assistive technology and to get more assistive technology into the hands of seniors and people with disabilities, particularly to help get them through the pandemic. It helps to combat isolation and support their independence and

well-being during this time, but SAIL really sees it as a mutually beneficial project as it's going to enhance their internal capacity to make sure that the right assistive technology is getting to the right people.

SAIL has an Accessible Documents Committee tasked with making their internal documents more accessible as well as supporting other organizations and businesses to ensure their documents are also accessible. That committee has been meeting throughout this past year and has done great work in educating staff on how to make documents as accessible as possible.

SAIL applied for the RFP put out by SDS for traumatic and acquired brain injury supports and services through a large portion of the state, including Southeast. They are awaiting word and are hopeful they will be awarded the funding.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo stated that SAIL's adaptive recreation program ORCA finished up their ski season, and it was great to do some in-person programming during the pandemic. The ORCA Program is now turning to the rehabilitation of the Challenge Course in Juneau. They have been working with the city and a local trail building non-profit to ensure the course is accessible and has the right equipment. They are getting ready to open to the public next month. This has been a couple-year journey, and they have been partnering with many fellow organizations and businesses to ensure everyone is accommodated to be able to participate in the course.

Tristan Knutson-Lombardo stated that SAIL is excited to hopefully have Pre-ETS programs in their five main offices of Juneau, Sitka, Haines, Ketchikan, and on Prince of Wales.

In terms of COVID, SAIL is close to having 100% of their staff vaccinated. The majority of staff have been asked to return to working at the offices as they hope to reopen their doors to the public later this spring or early summer.

### **DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (DVR) UPDATE**

Jim Kreatschman started off his presentation by offering Denise Gilroy the opportunity to enroll 10 more youth in her summer program, to which Denise gladly agreed.

Jim Kreatschman stated that DVR spends \$1.5 million each year for Pre-ETS with students with disabilities. There are a number of different programs utilized for Pre-ETS, and summer work is a program done with almost all of the CILs. He

anticipates 200 children will be served in the program this summer. Last year the program was shut down for the largest part of the year due to COVID, and they were only able to serve 600 kids through Pre-ETS. This year has started out slow, but people are becoming more optimistic thanks to the work of Denice and the programming at the school in Nome as well as the work that SAIL Sitka is doing in the school down there.

Jim reported that they have been able to expand their network of Pre-ETS providers during the pandemic, but they just haven't been able to serve all the kids. Some of that funding will be rolling over, and he doesn't yet know how much they will have to spend. He is eager to hear about creative programming being developed and expanding what they are doing in schools.

Jim Kreatschman stated that in terms of transition, it's been difficult throughout the pandemic, but they were able to build their own platform to host webinars. They have provided teacher trainings to over 500 teachers on transition, wellness in the classroom, and resiliency for students. They introduced the new Transition Workbook for Students, which is an assessment tool for teachers to gather information for good transition planning. They recently held a webinar to train teachers how to use that. Upcoming is the Virtual Statewide Transition Camp, which will be held four hours a day for four days. Participants in that camp will include AVTEC, Alaska Business Week, the Ironworkers Union, DVR, and TVR. He noted that it has been easy to get teachers engaged in training, but it's been hard to be able to connect and get teachers to bring their students to the trainings.

### **TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (TVR) UPDATE**

Irma Goodwine reported that many TVRs are still working remotely, and their office buildings are closed to any consumers. They are primarily working with consumers via telephone and e-mail, which has been challenging, but it's working. They partner with the tribal administrators out in the villages, so they are able to utilize the tribal offices for faxing, scanning, and e-mailing.

Irma stated that many of them are operating mainly with the carryover funds due to the pandemic. Last year the RFP went out for TVR programs nationwide who are up for refunding, but due to the pandemic, they cancelled that and extended their funding for one year at existing levels. This year Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Tlingit Haida, Kawerak, Nome, and AVCP are all up for refunding and have all submitted their grants as of April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Irma Goodwine stated that she has been working remotely since last March, and they are in the process of soft opening starting next week. Their COVID-19 task force has been working with all the different policies, and they will be going through a huge transition in their building. The AVCP Vocational Rehabilitation, Tribal Workforce Development, and Employment and Training will all be brought together under one umbrella called Workforce Investment Division. All of the different aspects are in the process of moving, and things are being arranged to follow COVID-19 guidelines.

Irma Goodwine stated that with the carryover monies, they have been able to send care packages to all their consumers, and previous consumers within one year, such as supplies to help with COVID-19.

### **IL CONFERENCE PLANNING**

Michael Christian asked new attendees and guests to introduce themselves. He then asked for previous IL Conference attendees to share their experiences from that conference.

Maggie Winston stated that the assistive technology component was really great, and she also appreciated the togetherness and learning from other people who had been part of independent living and the philosophy for many, many years. What she feels is most important for a conference, particularly for people who are new to the IL philosophy, would be training in person-first language, advocacy, and ingraining the philosophy and movement of independent living. She shared that her first experience with IL was as a board member for ILC. Joyanna Geisler immediately trained her on the history of the IL movement with Ed Roberts and Judy Heumann. That training and history made her feel like she is part of this movement that is still happening. Michael Christian noted that Ed Roberts' sister lives in Soldotna, and they might have an opportunity to bring her into the conference.

Dean Sundmark also commented on the education about the rich history of IL advocacy in Alaska. He also noted that all of the agencies have had a lot of turnover over the years, and having big sessions with the group together receiving information about the historical perspective from people who have been around for a long time is really helpful to understand how IL evolved in Alaska. He also thought the breakout sessions were great. The roundtables were excellent because all of the agencies are so geographically far apart and they don't get to work with each other very often. For instance, they had a big roundtable discussion on recreation and the different recreation programs in the state. It was one of the first

times that they could come together and compare notes and talk about that. He believes that any of those sorts of roundtable discussions about topics are really helpful for staff to see what other people are doing in other parts of the state and learning from each other.

Brigit Barstad mirrored that she appreciated the ability to dig into the IL philosophy and set the foundation of who they really are. More than anything, the conference was a fantastic opportunity to connect with the other centers around the state, because ultimately, they are all working towards the same goal. It was great to collaborate and learn about different resources that maybe they weren't aware of in their own areas but could be beneficial to their consumers. They oftentimes have consumers that are moving between locations, so it's fantastic to be able to facilitate those soft handoffs and know the staff and learn to collaborate.

Jess Doherty stated that what the Governor's Council is hoping for is the ability to come together and share resources. She offered resources the Council has recently developed such as the COVID-19 Toolkit, I Have Rights webinar, information about Supported Decision Making, as well as the Alaska Work Matters Task Force. Michael Christian noted that as they expect to see more Supported Decision Making happening through the CILs, it might be good to incorporate that into the conference. By the time they have this conference, the Alaska Work Matters Task Force will be further along in its work, and there might be some good information to share. Michael asked Jess if the Empowerment Through Employment conference will be happening this year, and Jess said she would check with Kristin Vandagriff and Anne Applegate for confirmation on that.

Ric Nelson suggested showing the documentary "Crip Camp" and having a Q&A session afterward. He noted that according to the fine print, Netflix will allow a showing for educational purposes. He will do some additional research on it.

Michael Christian stated that the IL Network is thinking about holding the conference in either January or March 2022. If they are able to pull the conference together for January, it would be a good time to talk about joint advocacy before doing legislative visits. Michael queried meeting attendees to see if there is anyone not present at this meeting today that would like to participate in the planning process. He noted that Lisa Morley would like to be, and Brigit Barstad commented that there might be a couple staff from Access that will join in.

Beverly Cole commented that she recently attended a virtual conference through ILRU, and they had a training about meeting people where they are at. They also

talked about the cultural broker component to get to different communities and all the different ways to meet people where they are at. Ric Nelson liked that idea and also suggested talking about the DD Shared Vision. Maggie Winston agreed with Ric, and volunteered to be on the planning committee. Beverly added that the ILRU also has a great training on micro aggressions that was very impactful.

Dean Sundmark suggested including all the other ADRCs and DDRCs that are not already contained in a CIL. Michael Christian also felt they should include all of the Trust beneficiary boards. Ric Nelson recommended inviting someone from the Trust.

Michael Christian stated that he will check into the Dena'ina Center to see if they can work out a deal because it's a location that can hold a lot of people. Jess Doherty asked if it would be a hybrid event of Zoom and in person. Michael stated that they will have time between now and next January or March to explore if in-person would be feasible. It will also depend on funding once they determine costs. It may be that they will have to go virtual, but they would rather be in person if possible. Jess suggested seeing if space was available at the university through their partnership with Center for Human Development. Ric suggested the BP Energy Center. The group discussed that the venue would need to be close to hotels because there will be people coming in from out of town. Dean Sundmark suggested Hotel Captain Cook, where the Full Lives Conference is held.

Michael Christian commented that there is interest within Region 10 to make this a regional IL conference. Region 10 is comprised of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, and several of the other states have quite a bit more funding to work with than Alaska does, so there is the potential to share costs. Michael will reach out and talk to the other SILCs to see what they can pull together.

Attendees agreed that the length of time for the conference should be two days. The following is a summary of comments made during this discussion as well as format and content from the previous conference:

- Roundtable format is great
- Showing of Crip Camp
- ATLA demonstration (invite ATLA to participate in planning)
- Presentation from Doug Toelle and Jim Beck on IL history
- National speaker
- Director of SDS

- CIL presentation contest on cool fundraising ideas or products
- Breakout discussions:
  - Supported Decision Making Agreements (SDMA)
  - Employment
  - Suggestions from AMHB/ABDA
  - Suggestions from ACoA
  - I Have Rights presentation retooled for the direct services provider mindset
  - Breakout for new staff that have questions – Peer Power advocacy training
  - Advocacy/peer support
  - Breakout sessions on special projects CILs are doing
  - Intersectionality
  - Outdated terminology and proper use of language
  - Inspiration Porn
- Group panel – people with lived experience discussing how they identify in terms of person-first language. Also worth taking a look at the SILC policy on person first.

It was suggested that the IL Conference Planning Committee meet monthly to start and more frequently as they get closer. Ric Nelson asked anyone interested in participating on the Planning Committee to e-mail Michael and Kathy.

### **SENIOR AND DISABILITIES SERVICES UPDATE**

Jetta Whittaker reported that SDS staff are on telework status likely through the summer. They are working to figure out how to use Jabber, which allows their desk phones to ring into their laptops at home, but it's not perfect. She believes the State will move to Teams for phone calls. She apologized to anyone having to wait for a call back from SDS because they haven't been receiving their calls.

Jetta explained that the Appendix K extension was submitted, and they have since received approval from CMS for extending all of the Appendix K flexibilities six months after the federal public health emergency ends, and based on a recent extension by the current secretary of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, it will be longer. As soon as they know, SDS will send out an e-alert. Regulations that will make permanent some of those flexibilities are being discussed now.

Jetta Whittaker stated she has been busy working on the waiver renewals for the last several weeks. She has been trying to finish up SDS's response to the federal request for additional information. They submitted their waiver renewals March 17<sup>th</sup> and a month later heard back from Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) with 72 questions. That was unexpected by SDS, so they have been working hard to craft responses that she will submit this afternoon. She anticipates there will be more questions to come, but they are still on target for the five-year waiver period for the four waivers. This renewal did not include the Individualized Supports Waiver, which is on a different renewal schedule.

Jetta stated that Electronic Visit Verification is up and running for personal care services now. The town halls that therapists have been holding are now moving to bi-weekly as of April, so that appears to be a good sign that the questions are dying off and providers are working through the implementation.

In terms of legislation, two bills have moved significantly during this session, and that includes the settings rule bill, which if it passes will make them completely compliant with their settings transition funds which has been outstanding from CMS; and the adult foster care bill, which may need some more analysis and a name change.

Jetta Whittaker noted that the DHSS reorganization did not move forward. It is still a concept that is in play, but the department needs to reanalyze some of the work flows within it.

Jetta stated that SDS is moving forward with the provider agreement to conduct home assessments to inform how people get environmental modifications as waiver services or other funding sources. This will be managed by the grants unit.

### **ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST UPDATE**

Eric Boyer explained that his focus as a program officer with the Trust is the behavioral health workforce, a responsibility he shares with Katie Baldwin-Johnson. He also introduced Kelda Barstad, a program officer for the focus areas of housing and long-term care.

Eric explained that the Trust exists to support the beneficiaries of Alaska who experience behavioral health issues, developmental disabilities, Alzheimer's and related dementia, and traumatic brain injury. They do advocacy efforts and convene leadership and funding. They provide everything from mini-grants to

partnership grants as well as grants in partnership with the State of Alaska and the legislature.

Every Friday the Trust convenes statewide legislative teleconferences where the Trust and the advocacy boards look at legislation that impacts Trust beneficiaries and the services they receive. This is a critical time of year for everybody as they look to see where the budget falls out as well as the funding coming into the state from the American Rescue Plan.

Eric Boyer stated that the Trust works on providing funding around grants monthly. Grants can be approved usually in a six to eight-week turnaround for amounts of \$100,000 or less. Larger grants have to be taken to the Trustees for approval.

Eric stated that the Board of Trustees is seven members appointed by the Governor. They currently have a relatively young board, and Chair Chris Cooke and Verne Boerner have the longest tenure of three to four years. The average tenure of a Trustee is currently a year to a year-and-a-half. There has been a lot of education and background provided to the Trustees to get them up to speed on the beneficiaries they serve and how they are served. As members of the SILC board talk with their constituents and people they serve in the community when they are looking for help or to partner with the Trust, the best way to do that is by contacting one of the program officers.

### **Behavioral Health Crisis System of Care**

Eric Boyer stated that one of the biggest initiatives the Trust has taken on in their almost 27 years of existence is implementing the behavioral health crisis system of care. The Trust has enlisted the help of former Trust CEO Jeff Jessee on this project as a contractor through Agnew::Beck, the project manager for this initiative. This system is looking at how to support beneficiaries in the community who are having some level of behavioral health crisis, including co-occurring developmental issues that could complicate the situations. The typical response to a behavioral health crisis currently is the response of a uniformed police officer, state trooper, or emergency medical personnel. Those responders do a great job and receive training related to this type of response, but that is not the primary background and training of that type of responder.

Eric Boyer showed the SILC slides representing the current structure of behavioral health services in the state. He noted the current capacity of community supports versus intensive evaluation and treatment in in-patient services. He noted that

there are no services in between. He likened the needed supports to a triage system for people in a behavioral health crisis, and that's the type of system they are working to stand up. There is a statewide call center called Careline in Fairbanks, but they are enhancing that system to be able to meet people's needs over the phone, and then also have the ability to dispatch two-person mobile crisis teams. The fidelity of the model is that the crisis team will be made up of a master's level clinician and a peer support specialist. If needed, the next level of care up is 23-hour stabilization based on Arizona's living room model. This level of support provides triage care, rehabilitation, engagement, assessment, case management, and safety planning to people at a high level for 23 hours, which is under the Medicaid parameters for level of care and treatment beds. The enhancement to the system would allow for triage to occur outside of the emergency room or jail.

Eric explained that most of these services are part of the new Medicaid 1115 waiver expansion. The Medicaid waiver will pay up to 70 to 80 percent of the cost of running those facilities, and then they will have to work on braiding funding between private pay and the state, legislature, the Trust, Rasmuson Foundation, and Mat-Su Health Foundation. The Trust is helping fund a lot of this initial work, and the project management team is made up of the Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Corrections, Department of Labor, Department of Public Safety, Department of Law, and people representing the advocacy boards. From there they break out into some contractors and community coordinators working at the ground level in the communities to pull together beneficiaries, stakeholders and advocacy groups so people have a say in how this is implemented.

They are currently in phase 1 of this project where they are working on enhancing existing services in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Mat-Su. The next phase is to start to bring in some of the other services and explore statewide implementation. Through implementation of this system, they want to reach the goal of supporting hospitals and law enforcement by giving them more ability to do what they do well and allow behavioral health integrated with the medical model to really work together.

Eric Boyer thanked the SILC for allowing him to present, and he thanked them for everything they do to support independent living.

### **SILC OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATION PLAN**

Michael Christian introduced John Tracy representing Foraker Group. John Tracy shared his background for the SILC and explained that he and Michael Christian

have been having ongoing conversations about the needs of the SILC and what they are attempting to do. He shared that he has done some research on the structure of the SILC and has reviewed the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL).

After introductions were made, John Tracy led the SILC through a guided discussion as follows:

***What does the group want to achieve with its communication program?***

- Need better messaging. Need to understand the platforms they are using for that messaging and how to better utilize partnerships with different state agencies to get the message across. What is our message, and how do we reach out?
- The SILC has a number of different audiences that they are trying to reach, from community partners to individual independent living consumers to potential donors and the general public.
- On October 1<sup>st</sup> the SILC will enter a partnership with the Northwest ADA Center to help improve their presence in Alaska, push out information on the ADA, and conduct ADA trainings across the state. There will be a huge need for outreach associated with that as well.

*The communications plan will help to identify priorities for target audiences.*

***What does “outreach” mean to the SILC? Who manages and monitors the outreach efforts?***

- Lines of communication on social media.
- Boots-on-the-ground communication and outreach in communities.
- Outreach and Communication Committee has been formed.

***What is the SILC doing now in terms of communication, marketing, and outreach?***

- The website is not working and is inaccessible.
- Need someone besides Michael Christian and Kathy Munk to manage the SILC Facebook page. Hopeful they will be able to hire additional part-time staff person in October as a result of funds coming in through the Northwest ADA Center.

- Outreach works very well when the SILC and/or executive director travels to communities to listen to consumers and partners. Will meet consumers where they are at in the community if they are unable to come to the SILC for listening sessions.

*They may find at the end of this process that although they are going to try to find some tools and tactics to reach a larger audience, the most effective return on investment is still going to be those face-to-face meetings and in-person community gatherings.*

*The current SILC website is lacking in information and substance. If the SILC wants people to be able to understand exactly what they do, the website could be much better than it is right now.*

*The Facebook page has also not been maintained since October of 2019. The lowest hanging fruit the SILC has to improve their outreach is to have a maintained Facebook page. Someone will need to be dedicated to Facebook. The page itself is very clean, and previous posts contained a lot of good information. Posting frequently with a calendar is going to be vital to the SILC's online presence.*

***Is there any fundraising effort attached to the communications and marketing effort?***

- There will be. Unfortunately a number of different events have slowed down the SILC's creation of a fund development plan. The initial focus was going to be around a Youth Leadership Forum they were hoping to start soon.
- The fundraising authorities are fairly new to SILCs across the U.S.

John Tracy then directed members of the SILC to the Marketing and Communications Plan Worksheet, and they discussed the mission of the SILC. He asked if the SILC had a tag line, and Michael Christian replied that they do not. John explained that they don't necessarily need one unless they feel there is a real need to.

***What are the core values of the organization?***

Note: The SILC does not provide direct services itself, but the SPIL is developed in partnership with the CILs, and they implement it together. The CILs are very heavily involved in providing the five core services of independent living, and the

SILC can provide supports to the CILs for special projects. The SILC also provides referrals to the CILs.

- Inclusion
- Diversion – support people in transitioning and divert them from assisted living or nursing facility level of care
- Resources and referrals
- Advocate.

***What are the SILC's strengths unique from their partner's?***

- Consumer control
- Serve all consumers of all age ranges and disability types
- The organization is run, both on the board and management level, by a majority of people with disabilities.
- Each of the four CILs is extremely unique, and they are allowed their uniqueness because of the quality guidance and support of the SILC.

***Can you explain what the SILC does to somebody who has no idea what it is in a way that is simple and understandable? How do people know to contact the SILC?***

- Lacking an elevator speech.
- People know about SILC mostly from word of mouth.
- Most people that call the SILC assume the SILC provides service.
- One of the SILC's biggest tasks is completing the SPIL every three years based on outreach and communication to inform the SILC what the goals of the SPIL should be.
- The SILC sends satisfaction surveys to the CIL consumers, which also helps inform the work of the SILC and CILs.

*A position statement tells everyone what the SILC's position is in the marketplace and exactly what they do. The challenge to the Outreach and Communication Committee will be to develop draft position statements for presentation to the full SILC. The position should include the word "advocate."*

***Based upon the partners that the SILC works with, what do you think your internal brand and identity is?***

- Compassionate
- Trustworthy
- Strong voice
- Diverse board with diverse people, diverse disabilities, and they come from different parts of Alaska
- With that diversity comes diverse knowledge and diverse experience, and that is valuable to partners
- Different age groups – inclusion. Promoting knowledge and information base to others.

***What is the external brand of the SILC? What are other people saying about the SILC?***

- A lot of people don't know who the SILC is.
- A lot of people who work at the CILs don't know who the SILC is.
- The senior community doesn't know what the SILC is; and they have limited, if any, knowledge about the CILs.
- This is a marketing opportunity. Nobody knows about the SILC, and they need a brand.
- Sometimes when people hear the term “independent living,” they think it's involved with housing.
- The term “independent living” has been utilized to describe assisted living centers, and it's a nationwide problem.
- Non-disabled teenagers have called the SILC thinking it's a support for students getting ready to graduate who want help becoming independent.

*It appears the word “independent” has become a barrier because of the way it has come to be known, but this can also be an opportunity. The biggest problem is that people don't know who the SILC is and what they do. It's hard to message beyond that until they raise a certain level of awareness so that people have an understanding of what it is the SILC does.*

***In respect to the goals of the SPIL, is there any goal that needs to be tackled more than the others when it comes to messaging?***

- Accessible, safe, affordable housing.
- Senior population aging in Alaska needs better access to housing, home and community-based services, and transportation outside of the three major population hubs.

- Internet access for people who live rural and remote.

### ***Target Audiences:***

*The Outreach and Communications Committee will need to review the goals of the SPIL and identify the unique audiences they may try to reach in pursuit of each of those goals. They will find that there will be different messages for each of those audiences. No organization will have a singular message they send out to everybody. An organization like the SILC that is so seeded in advocacy will need to have different talking points and messages for each of the audiences they are trying to reach. Once that has been created in the marketing and communications plan, they will be able to pull out the message whenever an issue comes up that needs to be addressed, and the language will already be prepared. What a communication and marketing plan does is anticipates those messages and audiences to be reached, and it allows the committee an opportunity to craft exactly what they want to say to that audience that would resonate the most. These messages need to be four or five sentences to each of the targeted audiences, and the committee should be able to explain why based on the research they will do.*

John Tracy summarized next steps for the SILC:

- There is an understanding amongst the entire board that there needs to be some sort of awareness raised in the community about what it is that the SILC does.
- This awareness needs to be raised with a number of different audiences.
- The two tools they are missing that need to be solved before they can move forward include updating the website and regular posting to the Facebook page. The website needs to quickly explain what it is the SILC is about. Front and center of the website needs to be the position statement, mission statement, or both. There also needs to be a visual representation of the mission or position to draw people in. The SILC will not make much progress as far as external messaging until they solve the Facebook issue. It's also a great way to grow an audience. In 2019 the SILC had a little over 500 followers, and that needs to be built back up.
- The Outreach and Communications Committee needs to work on the template provided for today's meeting and fill in the questions on the worksheet to start putting together the communication plan. After they have a draft put together, John would be happy to help hone the messaging to the extent that he can.

Michael Christian asked John Tracy if Foraker has anybody they can recommend to help out with an accessible website. John will put Michael in touch with communications people at Foraker.

**ADJOURN**

Nona Safra **MOVED** to adjourn the business meeting, **SECONDED** by Irma Goodwine. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the business meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

**PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

A public testimony period was offered and a full transcript was prepared.

**Minutes Approved: 9/28/21 – P.D.**