



Charlottesville Region Autism Action Group

Updates from the January 27, 2021 CRAAG Meeting

Thirty-four people attended the monthly meeting. This included twenty-four parents and ten professionals representing The Arc of the Piedmont, Faison Center, CA Human Services, Compass, Moms in Motion, Case Management from Region Ten, REACH, and Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA). Thanks to everyone who joined us that day. See [Agenda](#) and [Introductory presentation](#).

1. As a follow up to the CRAAG Readers Survey discussed at the October 28, 2020 meeting, a core group of parents met to discuss the input and agree on the scope of CRAAG's future efforts. Bob Kreps, CRAAG Chairperson, summarized the direction as follows.
 - **What is CRAAG's target audience?** CRAAG's target audience is students transitioning out of high school and adults throughout the lifespan with autism and other developmental disabilities (DD), and their families. We can have the biggest impact by focusing on the underserved adult population that has limited services after leaving the public education system.
 - **What is CRAAG's scope of reach?** We're committed to welcoming families and supporters in the City of Charlottesville and five counties surrounding it. CRAAG shares the same geographic area as Region Ten CSB, the single-point-of-entry to access for developmental disabilities (DD) waiver services in our region.
 - **What is CRAAG's advocacy plan?** Given our limited resources, our most effective approach is to follow the initiatives of partners, such as The Arc of Virginia, CA Human Services, Region Ten CSB, Virginia Autism Project, Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA), and Virginia Network of Private Providers. Our connection to the Charlottesville area DD Coalition of local providers is not as strong as we would like. We hope the DD Coalition will eventually collaborate with CRAAG to

strengthen and unify our local advocacy efforts. All of these organizations stay on top of pending legislation impacting developmental disabilities. By following and acting on the legislative alerts of these organizations we can keep our issues before the legislators in our region and assist them with their broader advocacy efforts at the state level.

- **What is CRAAG's focus/priority?** We've identified six considerations that influence our belief that the time is right to increase our focus on **housing, supports and services** for adults with autism or other developmental disabilities. The considerations are:
 - Favorable climate for affordable housing in Charlottesville/ Albemarle.
 - Eight years of groundwork on housing and services issues, makes us ready to take this work to the next level.
 - Strong support among parents and providers for the 2021 forthcoming survey of the needs, hopes and concerns of adults with autism and other developmental disabilities and their families.
 - Enthusiastic interest in the December 2020 Inclusive Housing Forum featuring two dynamic parents from Our Stomping Ground (OSG) (formerly City Center NOVA). CRAAG is now connected to this dynamic parent-driven inclusive housing initiative, and will participate in quarterly Inclusive Housing Group meetings.
 - Rachel's Haven, the proposed Hinton Avenue United Methodist Church's inclusive affordable housing unit of 15 apartments, 4-5 of which will be set aside for the DD population, is moving forward with planning after neighbors withdrew their opposition in late 2020. CRAAG is supporting the efforts of their Vision Team.
 - CRAAG volunteers are participating in several DBHDS stakeholder committees focused on housing and services. These include: Waiver Slot Assignment Committee (WSAC), Regional Quality Council for Region 1, SIS Stakeholder Workgroup, Integrated Housing Advisory Committee, and Region 1 Independent Housing Implementation Team.

2. CRAAG's next meeting will be on the evening of **February 24 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.** It will focus exclusively on **housing, supports and services**. CRAAG is publishing a survey in the February 2021 newsletter, and hope to have some preliminary results to discuss at the meeting. The survey, created by a team of CRAAG supporters, asks about needs, hopes, and

concerns in the next five years and targets self-advocates, high school students who will graduate this year and next, and their families. We were encouraged by the local partners' offers to circulate the survey to the families they serve. If the survey reveals enough interest in networking with other self-advocates and families through CRAAG on this issue, we feel confident that CRAAG can make tangible progress on the housing, supports and services available in our community.

3. Provider updates:

- **CA Human Services'** lobbyist, Becky Bowers-Lanier, updated the group on the difficulty of advocating for disability legislation during the long days of Virginia's second virtual General Assembly (GA) session. "Relationships don't work this way," she said. Gone are the visits to legislative offices, casual discussions in between meetings, and connections to other advocates. Her strong advice is to call and email our regional legislators to keep CRAAG's issues in front of them.
- **VIA and The Arc of the Piedmont** pointed out that their organizations have taken different sides on CSA legislation pending in the GA. It was heartening to hear that while our partners may not always agree with each other, they work together well on the local level.

After the meeting, VIA reached out to CRAAG asking for help in publicizing three budget amendments for the House and Senate. Quoting from the email, "These amendments align with the most recent findings from the Nov 2020 JLARC report, *'Review of the Children's Services Act and Private Special Education Day School Costs.'* In addition, these amendments do not cost anything (and in fact would return money) to VA's budget. Ultimately, if these budget amendments were to pass, they would: 1) enable VIA and other private special education day schools to remain competitive during the pandemic by removing language that potentially varies the tuition rate for virtual instruction, 2) allow VIA and similar programs to remain competitive with our local school districts' staff salaries and benefits by removing the arbitrary 2% tuition cap (that the JLARC report noted was not a driver off increased costs, and 3) return money proposed for a tuition rate study that the JLARC report noted as unnecessary." Since this request is time sensitive, we decided to respond by forwarding VIA's email to the large mailing list of those who regularly attend CRAAG meetings in order to allow them to take the steps requested by VIA, if they so choose.

- **Moms in Motion** announced that the state-level Appendix K COVID-19 flexibilities have been extended through March 11th due to the continuing pandemic. This means that they will continue to serve families virtually and families can continue to be paid as Attendants for a couple more months. After the meeting, Moms in Motion learned that the federal government extended the pandemic status through the end of 2021. They are waiting on guidance from DMAS as to what flexibilities they will extend on the state-level. They are now waiting for guidance from DMAS to see what flexibilities they will extend at the state level under Appendix K.
- **VIA, Region Ten and The Arc of the Piedmont** announced that they are finally beginning to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations. This is key to normalizing programs and services over the coming months.
- **VIA** announced the “soft opening” of the new [Center for Adolescent and Adult Autism Services \(CAAAS\)](#) is scheduled for opening in the spring of 2021. VIA is hoping for a grand opening celebration (including all CRAAG members) for some time in the fall (provided they can maintain safety with the pandemic).

February 8, 2021