



Legislative Town Hall: January 27, 2023

Community Support Network, WIHD 2023 Transition Institute

Comment Responses from Commissioner Neifeld

Will the consultant address the initial self-direction budget approval process? It currently takes families months sometimes over a year before receiving their budget approval delaying their ability to access services.

Response:

- The consultant will be evaluating many aspects of the self-direction model, which includes an opportunity for comparison on how other states review and approve budgets and will be identifying areas for efficiencies.
- OPWDD is also exploring potential IT solutions to monitor the self-direction model, more expeditiously approve budgets and budget amendments, manage capacity, and help staff and stakeholders to get better access to services.
- OPWDD has been able to eliminate the current backlog by pulling staff from other tasks to help with backlog and has implemented a more streamlined review processes to prevent future backlogs.

It would be great as OPWDD developed that infrastructure if you could consider ways to make it easier for staff to work across FI's. As a parent of a SD client and also a SD CommHab provider I've learned what a barrier the application to multiple agencies becomes.

Response:

- An area of focus for the consultant also will be on how to create efficiencies and establish consistency across Fiscal Intermediaries within the system, including the transition between FIs and the potential for variations among agencies.

For self-direction- budget amounts determination should be by zip codes not just the region. Taconic for example there is a big difference for cost of living from the southern part of the region to the northern part of the region.

Response:

- We will consider this suggestion through the self-direction evaluation. You may also want to provide this feedback when there is opportunity for comment through the HCBS Waiver amendment process.

With current OPWDD regulations, com hab staff are able to support individuals using self-direction when they volunteer in the community. Will OPWDD be allowing com hab staff to also support people if they are getting paid? This would certainly increase the number of people employed across the state.

Response:

- Community Habilitation services are generally not vocational in nature. However, Community Habilitation services do support people in their attainment of life goals, including career goals.
- Therefore, Community Habilitation may include habilitation activities such as volunteering, learning about different types of jobs, visiting job sites and other experiences that are not long-term vocational commitments; yet the person is exposed to the world of work and the experience broadens his or her understanding of the types of employment they may wish to actively pursue in the future.

- Once a person is employed, community habilitation services may be used in a work setting to facilitate and promote independence, community inclusion, relationship building and socially appropriate behaviors. Community habilitation services cannot be used for job coaching or job development related activities and cannot be provided at the same time as supported employment services.
- It is important that staff and management are familiar with the allowable services and requirements for both Supported Employment and Community Habilitation in order to differentiate between service types and to assure staff meet the requirements of each service. It is also important that people are matched to jobs that meet their preferences and abilities and the person can perform the essential functions of the job after initial training. Accommodations on the job may include job coaching and other supports, ongoing and as needed.

Also, Commissioner – Might be out of your control but please give some thought to getting rid of the skill and achievement credentials because there are no minimum requirements for job training and therefore students with disabilities can at times be just pushed through to adulthood with no job skills.

Response:

- You are correct – this is a NYS Education Department (NYSED) program and therefore I do not have the authority to make these changes. However, OPWDD meets with NYSED on a monthly basis, and our staff can share this feedback with NYSED representatives.

Self-Direction is a wonderful option, but the process is too difficult for parents, com hab workers and agencies.

Response:

- We understand your frustration. The Self-Direction program has become a popular option for people with developmental disabilities, growing at an incredible pace, which is why we are taking the time to review and make decisions about how we can make it

more sustainable moving forward. The consultant for the Self-Direction Evaluation will be tasked with gathering and assessing widely representative stakeholder input to evaluate and provide recommendations on making the service model more consistent, efficient and sustainable.

I am currently texting with a parent of a 17-year-old with intense needs, cannot staff her SD budget and the only response is get an attorney and sue the school district. That response was from OPWDD.

Response:

- Without knowing the specific scenario, and all of the details surrounding this issue, we would suggest that the parent contact their CCO and work with the regional office so that we can better understand the issue and assist.

How will you share the plan to reach out to employers statewide with benefits of employing individuals with I/DD? We are parents, agencies, communities can assist. Yesterday, we had a number of small businesses that have opened to hire employees specifically with Disabilities. They are doing some ground roots work to get people with IDD “trained and paid”. Could more partnerships and support for those kinds of small businesses be increased?

Response:

OPWDD has several initiatives focused on building relationships and partnerships with corporations and businesses:

- **OPWDD issued a Request for Applications** recently initiated a grant-funded project, Career Specific Vocational Training, for provider agencies to partner with businesses or educational organizations to develop and adapt curricula and teach career skills related to specific industries. Providers are required to combine the career-specific vocational training classes funded through this grant with community

vocational experiences funded through OPWDD HCBS Waiver prevocational services to increase the marketable skills that people with developmental disabilities need to meet the demands of today's employers. People who successfully complete the training will then be supported to seek a related job in the community.

- **OPWDD is developing a training for businesses** that builds on the EmployAbility toolkit which promotes the benefits of hiring people with developmental disabilities. The training will initially be offered to businesses that signed OPWDD's EmployAbility pledge and will then expand to the general business community. The initial set of trainings are projected to occur later in 2023. After the initial training, OPWDD will refine and expand the training to offer to businesses statewide. The content will focus on improving hiring practices, learning about available resources, and workforce inclusion of people with developmental disabilities. OPWDD will partner with business and industry associations to launch the newly developed training. In addition, OPWDD's EmployAbility web page also features businesses throughout the year that have hired and recognize the benefits of hiring people with developmental disabilities.
- **OPWDD's Employment Training Program (ETP)** offers paid internships in businesses that lead to competitive employment in the community where a person earns at least minimum wage. Interns start with discovery and career planning, then are matched to an internship at a community business based on their preferences, skills and abilities. When the intern learns the job, the business hires the person directly. OPWDD funds supported employment agencies to provide job coaching supports for people during the internship and long term, as needed while the person is employed.

There is a big gap between those that can or eventually can work in Competitive Integrated Employment. OPWDD programs such as ETP, SEMP, and even Pre-voc, as well as Acces-VR support those individuals. However, there are lots of people who would like to work, but will always need more support, but can be employed with that ongoing support. Are there any models that can fill that need?

Response:

- OPWDD starts with a comprehensive discovery and career planning process to match people to jobs in their community where they can perform the required jobs tasks with initial job coaching supports. Job coaching supports are typically faded as the person gains competency with the job tasks. Often a quality job match will allow the person to learn the job and perform the tasks without full-time, ongoing supports. The Employment Training Program (ETP) offers businesses the incentive to invest in training a person with I/DD to learn a job by paying the initial wages. People who participate in ETP also receive job coaching in addition to the typical job orientation and training provided by the business.
- However, OPWDD also funds creative solutions for people with higher support needs who can perform the essential functions of a job such as Customized Employment. Customized employment is when a job that mutually benefits an employee and employer is created to match a person's skills with targeted job tasks.
- Small-group employment is also an option for people who need higher levels of job coaching to retain employment. Small group employment may include job sharing or partnerships with businesses to hire a small group of employees.. OPWDD SEMP funds small group employment options and the job coaching support needed, as long as the jobs meet minimum wage and integrated settings requirements.

We are a Tier 4 family who have been approved since 2018. We have had 8 care managers with the same CCO. Nothing in the CCO compensation structure is aligned with our families' needs. We are required to do constant meeting and create documents, etc., and have spent countless hours on these tasks. Yet we have never received a single hour of respite or comm habilitation or any other service. There are simply no incentives in the system to meet our needs. Are there initiatives to change the onerous nature of the CCO relationship on families and make it more focused on aligning objectives?

Response:

- OPWDD is invested in continuing to evaluate our programs and processes to make sure that people with disabilities and families that engage in any part of our system are able to do so in the simplest and most accommodating way possible. Specific to care management and the CCOs, OPWDD has several initiatives underway and planned over the next 5-years, as noted in our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. (To learn more about our strategic plan, please visit: [Strategic Planning | Office for People With Developmental Disabilities \(ny.gov\)](https://www.opwdd.ny.gov/strategic-planning))

These initiatives include:

- Developing a Statewide Quality Improvement Strategy, which includes plans to enhance the effectiveness of the CCO Care Management model. One important goal of this effort is to work toward incentivizing care managers to focus on the quality of services they are providing, satisfaction of people utilizing their service, and how to best meet the needs of those they serve.
- Implementing a CCO Program Evaluation, which will engage an external consultant to evaluate the CCO model, including identifying promising practices and areas/policies that can be changed to improve the quality of care managers and the model. The evaluation will also include opportunities for people to share their experiences and stories engaging with CCOs, review of current procedures (including documentation requirements), and identification of opportunities to streamline processes.
- Conducting a quality case review project which focuses on the effectiveness of care management from both the person/family and CCO perspective, including people with disabilities and their families' satisfaction levels and an assessment of care managers abilities to resolve challenges and improve access to services. The information collected through this project will be shared with the CCO

program evaluation consultant, to further inform future modifications to the CCO model.

This is a great summary on complex needs but please note that CSIDD/NY START does not incorporate ABA which is a necessary component of autism crisis care. Commissioner, please address the issue of residential capacity for high need individuals. Those individuals who need longer term behavioral supports.

Response:

- In addition to working closely with OMH to ensure that the investments in Mental Health will benefit people with dual diagnoses, OPWDD is working on new models for providing services to people who need **transitional residential supports** prior to transitioning to long-term residential settings.
- OPWDD is exploring new models for providing services to people who currently receive intensive supports in state-operated residential settings and who require intermediate transitional residential supports prior to transitioning to long-term residential settings.
- This year's Executive Budget also includes **\$11.7 million dollars in capital funding to create additional Intensive Treatment Opportunities** (ITO) units at the former Finger Lakes Developmental Center Campus.
- OPWDD is building capacity to assist providers with technical support teams who will help with successful transitions.
- We are simplifying our process for accessing high needs funding for providers which should encourage providers to support people with more complex needs. The move to acuity-based rates will also ensure providers will have adequate funding to support extra staff or services.
- Finally, State Operations is increasing its focus on its role as 'safety net' provider, which will increase the proportion of services that are focused on people with unique needs and greater challenges.

What are the options for a housing subsidy for an accessory apartment?

Can we get the name of this program again? And where to find the application draft.

Can you share the draft applications?

Response:

- Information regarding OPWDD's Housing Subsidy program can be found here: [ADM #2022-03 OPWDD Housing Subsidy Program | Office for People With Developmental Disabilities \(ny.gov\)](#)
- All housing units, including accessory apartments, must meet the requirements articulated in the Administrative Memorandum (ADM) and must meet every item identified in the Quality Assurance Expectations Checklist (attachment A to the ADM).

I have a few questions about the employment and medical (mental) health system, 1. When did the EmployAbility pledge OPWDD website updated? 2. Has OPWDD already developed a curriculum for this Pledge? When will they start offering it? 3. Who at OPWDD I can talk to about how this Pledge will work? 4. How do they plan to get people jobs? 5. How are you planning to fix the medical (mental) health system that is suggesting every day?

Response:

- OPWDD is developing a training for businesses that builds on the EmployAbility toolkit which promotes the benefits of hiring people with developmental disabilities. The training will initially be offered to businesses that signed OPWDD's EmployAbility pledge and will then expand to the general business community.

- The initial set of trainings are projected to occur late spring, 2023. After the initial training, we will refine and expand the training to offer to businesses statewide. The content will focus on improving hiring practices, learning about available resources, and workforce inclusion of people with developmental disabilities.
- OPWDD will partner with business and industry associations to launch the newly developed training. OPWDD's website also features businesses throughout the year that have hired and recognize the benefit of hiring people with developmental disabilities.
- In addition, OPWDD funds a variety of services designed to assist people to develop a career path, build work-related skills and community experiences, and to gain and retain employment. Please see OPWDD's website, visit OPWDD's Front Door sessions, or discuss these options with your Care Manager to see which option best fits the person.
- Governor Hochul's FY 2024 Executive Budget includes a comprehensive \$1 billion multi-year plan to transform the continuum of mental health care and drastically reduce the number of people with unmet mental health needs throughout the State. There are people in the OPWDD system that are dually diagnosed with both developmental disabilities and a mental health disorder and OPWDD is working closely with our agency partners at the Office of Mental Health to determine how the investments there can benefit those dually diagnosed people who often have some of the greatest needs.

I think a vocational program with BOCES would be a great way to get much needed and well-trained DSPs in the system. Better pay would certainly make attending that program more attractive to young people looking for careers.

Response:

- We absolutely agree suggestion to work with BOCES. In fact, OPWDD is using a portion of our American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to provide grants to high school Career and Technical Education programs (including BOCES) that are

interested in offering DSP training programs. Providers will provide internship opportunities for these students, who we hope will join our workforce.

- ARPA funds are also being used to:
 - Partner with the SUNY system at Community Colleges and Educational Opportunity Centers to develop micro-credential programs across the state. Numerous colleges have expressed interest in participating, and OPWDD anticipates the first micro-credentialing initiatives to begin in spring 2023.
 - Support the NY Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation to provide technical assistance to voluntary service providers on recruitment and retention techniques.
 - Launch a statewide marketing/recruitment campaign for the direct support profession to benefit both state and voluntary agency recruitment efforts.
- OPWDD also recently completed a project with Empire State College (ESC) to assign college credit for training and experience. OPWDD-required trainings for DSPs (retroactive to 2018) will now count towards college credit at ESC for those state and voluntary DSPs and Frontline supervisors who wish to pursue higher educational opportunities. These prior learning and experience credits can save a student up to \$3,500 per semester.

I have a son with an IDD and have a horse farm in Westchester county and I'd love to partner to put housing on the property and have those living there work on the farm but I'm having difficulty partnering with anyone on this – any help would be greatly appreciated Laura Labriola lauralabriola@hotmail.com.

Response:

- To develop a certified housing opportunity, you must be a certified service provider approved by OPWDD and be in good standing. Proposals are solicited through letters of intent/interest (LOI). Currently OPWDD is not accepting new service provider applications, however you may want to reach out to existing service providers in your

area to see if there is an opportunity for collaboration.

- You can search for a list of provider agencies in your area on OPWDD's website at <https://providerdirectory.opwdd.ny.gov/>
- You also may want to reach out to service provider agencies in your area that offer supported employment (SEMP) as an option for people interested in working on a farm.