

OPWDD State of the State 2022 Overview

Enhancing OPWDD Employment and Training Programs

Individuals with developmental disabilities as well as other disabilities are significantly under-represented in the general workforce. While there are many services within OPWDD available to individuals, there is generally not a clear path for individuals to move between services to gain the necessary social and work skills that will ultimately lead to competitive employment. OPWDD's goal and mission is to help people live richer lives. While a rich life includes many things, employment significantly contributes to a higher quality of life, and the support to help someone achieve that goal must be incorporated into our service system as an everyday practice.

As a result of the pandemic, OPWDD's supported employment services has seen the number of people who are unemployed double. Of the 16,000 people receiving employment and vocational services, 3,000 are currently seeking competitive employment. Additionally, there are approximately 50,000 individuals receiving day habilitation services, some of whom could benefit from job-readiness training and other vocational services.

There are systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing multiple services or moving easily between services. This proposal calls for the development and piloting of an employment, vocational and day service model for providers. This requires providers to restructure their delivery of services to improve employment outcomes. This model development will demonstrate that by offering a continuum of employment services, individuals will have more opportunities for not only community engagement but for employment. This proposal will produce a "guide for providers" to restructure how they deliver employment, vocational and day services in accordance with New York State's Employment First commitment and OPWDD's person-centered approach to service delivery. Additionally, the guide will include a sustainability plan for funding and staff training initiatives. This proposal can be implemented with some minor revisions to the current employment and vocational services regulations and a significant redesign of day habilitation to improve community engagement and employment outcomes.

Through a business model change and increased staff training, the desired outcome will be an increase in OPWDD participants in vocational, employment and more individualized day services delivered in the broader community. In addition, through this service redesign process, providers will be encouraged to develop alternative service delivery and schedules that will support individuals who no longer desire traditional services.

This proposal builds off the existing employment, vocational and day services and will address the following:

- 1. Increase the number of individuals competitively employed** by providing job readiness skills and community vocational experiences to meet the demands of today's employers. Individuals can only become competitively employed when they obtain the skills employers want and need. While OPWDD provides support both on the job and in developing the job, the individual needs to participate in vocational experiences and social skill development before they begin a job search. Experience in the community is key to success in employment.

- 2. Increase the number of provider agencies that offer the full continuum** of day, vocational and employment services so that they can seamlessly provide individuals with high quality services that best meet their needs. Individuals need an opportunity not only to gain skills but to have experiences that will help them set career and vocational goals. The full continuum of services includes day habilitation that consist of community engagement and job-readiness activities; prevocational services that offer multiple vocational experiences to determine the person's interests and skills; and supported employment which will help the person find a job that matches their skills and abilities and the support required on the job.

- 3. The OPWDD service system, including provider agencies delivering day, vocational and employment services,** need to be comprehensively trained on the full continuum available to individuals. This training is critical to empower individuals to successfully meet their goal of competitive employment. Additionally, the direct care staff will need training to reinforce the idea that the people we serve can develop skills to become employed. Staff providing employment, vocational and day services staff must assist in job-readiness activities and gain an understanding of delivering person-centered services. Once a model has been designed and tested, Care Coordination Organizations (CCO's) and their staff will need additional education and training in employment, vocational and day services as well as career and vocational planning.

- 4. Reduce dependence on site-based programs** and offer more community engagement activities by training direct care staff in the delivery of job-readiness services and person-centered planning. As staff are trained and educated in the delivery of job-readiness activities, the development of unique community engagement activities, and instilling the belief that the people we serve can obtain employment; less people will be in site-based programs.

In addition to OPWDD's efforts to change its employment programs' business model OPWDD will make available a training grant to providers that will enable them to provide skill building activities for people with developmental disabilities.

- Currently, OPWDD provides habilitative services through its Medicaid waiver, however it does not support skill building programs that can equip people with disabilities to enter the workforce with marketable skills necessary to succeed.
- Governor Hochul will direct OPWDD to release a competitive procurement seeking providers who will train people with developmental disabilities in the skills needed to achieve in today's workforce.
- A \$10 million (over years) grant opportunity could provide at least 2,000 people with this training.

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