



## Report to the Legislature Pursuant to Chapter 60 of the Laws of 2014

### Introduction

Chapter 60 of the Laws of 2014 added a new section 13.41 to Mental Hygiene Law (Appendix A) requiring the Commissioner of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to establish an “Integrated Employment Plan” to increase employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. The law required OPWDD to consult with the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council (DDAC) and obtain input from other stakeholders.

The law also required OPWDD to submit the Integrated Employment Plan to the Temporary President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly and post it on the OPWDD website within 180 days of the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ (CMS) approval of OPWDD’s plan to increase competitive employment for people with developmental disabilities. The competitive employment plan was approved by CMS on May 1, 2014, thus establishing a November 1, 2014 deadline to submit the Integrated Employment Plan to the legislative leaders and post on the OPWDD website.

### Integrated Employment Plan

The integrated employment plan includes strategies to increase competitive employment opportunities for individuals transitioning from educational programs and sheltered workshops and to collect data. It also identifies strategies to increase job retention, strategies to assist individuals with significant behavioral or health issues and offers a plan to assess funding and necessary supports for individuals and providers.

#### (1) Identification of strategies to increase competitive employment opportunities

Competitive employment is defined as employment in an integrated setting, in the general workforce, where a person earns at least minimum wage. In order to increase the number of people who are competitively employed, OPWDD has identified a number of strategies to increase competitive employment opportunities for individuals transitioning from educational programs. The most promising include the creation of a new Pathway to Employment service, a redesigned Supported Employment service and establishing more collaborative relationships with the Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) and the New York State Commission for the Blind.

#### Pathway to Employment

Pathway to Employment is a new person-centered, comprehensive career planning and support service that provides assistance for participants to obtain, maintain or advance in competitive employment or self-employment. The service became available in July, 2014. It is a focused, time-limited service that engages a participant in identifying a career direction, provides instruction and training in pre-employment skills, and develops a plan for achieving competitive, integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within twelve months, this service will document each participant’s stated career

objective, create a detailed career plan to guide the individual's employment supports and prepare for supported employment services and obtainment of a job.

The Pathway to Employment service is available to individuals who are eligible for OPWDD services and enrolled in the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver including individuals who are currently receiving day habilitation, prevocational, or workshop services as well as students transitioning from high school.

Since June of 2014, OPWDD has provided Pathway to Employment training to 203 provider agencies. Topics included in the Pathway provider training are discovery, job retention, person-centered planning, the Pathway to Employment process, billing, and the process for delivery of the Pathway services. In September, 2014 over 500 Medicaid Services Coordinators received Pathway to Employment training to help educate families about the new service. Training Medicaid Service Coordinators was a top priority given their role in navigating families and individuals through the OPWDD eligibility process and enrollment into services. Families and individuals have also received information about Pathway to Employment as part of the Community Dialogue sessions.

#### Supported Employment Redesign

OPWDD and the Department of Health are working on a redesign of Supported Employment services to incentivize employment, address challenges related to job retention and more adequately fund employment supports. Components of the new supported employment fee and billing structure will include specific phases for job development, job coaching and "follow along supports," which are long-term supports that help individuals maintain employment. It is anticipated that the redesigned supported employment service will be available beginning January 1, 2015.

#### Interagency Collaboration

OPWDD will also seek to work more collaboratively with the State Education Department's ACCES-VR team and the New York State Commission for the Blind to increase the number of individuals with developmental disabilities who successfully obtain and maintain competitive employment. All individuals who apply for OPWDD services will receive information about the availability of supported employment and Pathway to Employment services. OPWDD's regional offices will partner with local ACCES-VR and Commission for the Blind offices to identify the most appropriate service to assist each individual in becoming competitively employed. Upon completion of the Pathway to Employment service some individuals may transition to ACCES-VR or Commission for the Blind for supported employment services, while other individuals may transition to OPWDD supported employment services. OPWDD is also working with the Office of Special Education to educate school district and high school administrators, regional transition specialists and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) superintendents about employment options for high school students.

#### **(2) Data concerning job retention and the identification of strategies to increase job retention**

In May 2013, OPWDD began to collect data on the number of individuals with developmental disabilities receiving supported employment services, number of individuals that are employed, their salary, the

employment setting (integrated or segregated) and employment start date. This data was used to establish a March 31, 2013 baseline of 9,832 individuals with developmental disabilities enrolled in supported employment services. Of this total, 7,044 individuals were competitively employed in an integrated setting earning at least minimum wage. As of August 2013, providers were required to submit monthly reports on the number of people on their supported employment roster, whether those individuals are employed, whether the employment setting is integrated or segregated, the type of employment placement (individual or enclave) and employment start date. For purposes of data collection, a segregated setting is defined as a work setting where workers with developmental disabilities and/or mental illness only interact with, and work alongside, other workers with disabilities. The data that is now being collected from supported employment providers contains better information about retention by provider and region of the state; reason for job loss; and the amount of time a person is employed.

This data will be used to work with provider agencies to create strategies to improve job retention. OPWDD will participate in ongoing dialogue with provider agencies about data, including improving the accuracy, integrity and collection of data and addressing lags in the reporting of data. This will improve OPWDD's ability to track successful employment outcomes, retention rates and the overall quality of supported employment services.

OPWDD has collected data on the contributing factors to lessened job retention among people with developmental disabilities. The factors include the following:

- 18% of individuals said the job requirements were not a good fit for their skills
- 16% of individuals said they left the job because they no longer wanted to work
- 15% of individuals had behavioral challenges
- 13% of individuals lacked transportation
- 12% of individuals were afraid of losing benefit payments (Medicaid, SSI, SSDI, Food Stamps)
- 8% of individuals were laid off
- 8% of individuals were not satisfied with their job
- 2% of individuals stopped working for medical reasons
- 8% of individuals identified "other" reasons (needing to care of a sick parent or younger siblings, relocation to another part of the state or out of state, etc)

Improving job development and coaching supports, including better discovery and matching of an individual's skills and interests with an employer's needs and more frequent on-the-job supports, could improve job retention. The new Pathway to Employment service is designed to address several of these issues.

### **(3) Identification of models of integrated employment**

Since the 1980s, supported employment has been nationally recognized as a best practice that has been successful in assisting individuals with developmental disabilities in achieving the goal of integrated employment. Having a job coach or employment specialist provide on the job supports has helped individuals with developmental disabilities to not only learn job tasks but also to develop relationships

with co-workers and develop natural supports. Job developers must have a very unique set of skills to successfully match an individual with developmental disabilities with a job.

Job carving and customized employment are also nationally recognized as best practices that have been successful in matching an individual's skills, abilities and interests with the very specific needs of an employer. Job carving is the practice of modifying the duties and description of an existing job so that a person with a disability is hired to perform some, but not all, of the tasks from the original job description. "Carving" specific responsibilities from multiple positions can provide appropriate employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities while enhancing productivity of existing employees.

Customized employment means establishing a unique employment relationship between an individual employee and their employer. Such relationships are based on each individual's strengths, needs, and interests and designed to meet the employer's specific needs. Customized employment includes the provision of reasonable accommodations and supports necessary for the individual to perform the functions of a job that is individually negotiated and developed.

In order to ensure that supported employment agencies have the ability to develop expertise in these areas, four years ago OPWDD began to offer trainings to the employment staff of provider agencies. The Innovations in Employment Training Series offers courses on Discovery and Employment Assessment, Job Development and Job Coaching. Pathway to Employment has recently been added to the training series along with courses for the management-level staff of supported employment agencies. Technical assistance seminars have also been added for providers that are new to supported employment. In addition to employment staff, these courses are also available to residential staff, day services staff, Medicaid Service Coordinators and self-directed/hired staff.

#### **(4) Strategies to assist individuals in the transition from sheltered workshop to competitive employment**

The main components of OPWDD's workshop transformation are strategies for workshop participants to transition to competitive employment, retirement or other community inclusion options. OPWDD will also work with provider agencies interested in creating community businesses that are consistent with new federal regulations applicable to home and community based settings.

There are 8,000 individuals currently receiving workshop services. Since 40% of workshop participants are age 50 and older and another 10% of workshop participants have complex medical or behavioral needs, OPWDD estimates that only 50% of workshop participants will be able to successfully transition to competitive employment over six years. Other OPWDD services such as community habilitation, community pre-vocational, self-direction, self-employment or day habilitation will be service options for individuals that will not be transitioning to competitive employment.

The six year time frame for the elimination of funding for workshops will enable OPWDD to employ a multi-year strategy to educate workshop participants about competitive employment options, begin transition planning and identify individuals who are interested in competitive employment. OPWDD has

not identified annual goals for the number of people who will be leaving workshops; however, communication has begun with providers, families and individuals receiving services about the need for a person-centered discovery and planning process that will identify the supports and services required to help individuals find and retain appropriate employment. The first step in this person centered process is making the new Pathway to Employment services available to all workshop participants.

### **Discovery, Assessment and Transition Planning**

Pathway to Employment services will be offered to all workshop participants to assist in their exploration of competitive employment options. Discovery and assessment will focus on both the individual and their environment. This process will be used to identify supports and services that will assist an individual in obtaining competitive employment. Since a variety of discovery, assessment and transition planning tools already exists, OPWDD will not require the use of a specific tool but providers will be required to cover a minimum of the following:

- An assessment of the individual's soft skills (social behavior, ability to handle stress, willingness to work with others, etc), job performance (attendance, punctuality, hygiene/grooming, etc), communication skills, work ethic (motivation, initiative, focus, etc), interest (likes, wants, dislikes, dreams, etc).
- An assessment of the individual's situation: transportation needs, family supports, physical and mental health, safety, etc.
- Opportunities for individuals to explore different community experiences to obtain information that will be used to create a person-centered transition plan.
- Transition plans will include both work and non-work activities that create opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful community activities.
- Transition plans will include activities and options that allow individuals to maintain social networks and friendships established in the workshops.
- Each individual's circle of support and family members will be included in the transition planning process.

### **Family Engagement**

Families will be actively involved in the discovery, assessment and planning process for workshop participants transitioning to competitive employment. Families will also receive information about the impact of working on benefits, how their loved one will travel to and from work; what other meaningful community activities their loved one will be engaged in when they are not working; how job coaching supports will be provided; what happens if their loved one loses their job; and the type of supports that will be provided to help their loved one obtain new employment.

### **Staff Training**

Workshop staff will be trained on how to perform the discovery, assessment and person-centered planning necessary to assist individuals in transitioning from workshops to supported employment. OPWDD's Innovations in Employment Training will be utilized to retrain staff. OPWDD will also encourage providers to create opportunities for workshop staff to work as a team with their supported employment staff.

### **Peer Mentoring**

OPWDD will partner with providers, independent living centers and self-advocates to identify peer mentors who have successfully transitioned from workshop services to competitive employment. Peer mentors will share success stories with families and workshop participants and encourage them to try competitive employment options.

### **Self-Direction**

Self-direction will be explored as a way to assist in the transition to competitive employment. Some individuals may be interested in the flexibility of self-directing their own job development and/or coaching staff.

### **Self-Employment**

As part of the assessment and transition planning process, self-employment will be included as a possible career choice. Self-employment could be funded by ACCES-VR or Commission for the Blind, or as part of Pathway to Employment or Supported Employment. Examples of individuals becoming successfully self-employed include dog walkers, groomers and pet sitters, photographers, music DJ's, artists, landscapers and snow removers.

## **(5) Partnerships with business communities and senior services**

In an effort to increase job opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, OPWDD will continue to foster partnerships with the business community including The Business Council, the New York State Department of Labor and Empire State Development Corporation, and the New York State Office for the Aging.

OPWDD is currently working with the Business Council of New York State to help provide information to the business community regarding the benefits of employing individuals with developmental disabilities, the steps taken to prepare and support employees both before they are hired and once they are in the workplace, and the availability of \$6 million in tax credits for businesses who hire individuals.

Collaboration with the Department of Labor is focused on improving interaction between OPWDD funded supported employment providers and Department of Labor One Stop Centers, which can provide benefit counseling and job matching services to job seekers. The Department of Labor also works with OPWDD and other agencies to assist individuals with disabilities find employment through the New York Employment Services System (NYESS) which provides all New Yorkers regardless of their disability with a single point to access all employment related services and supports, including job matching with the approximately 90,000 jobs currently posted by employers in the NYS Job Bank.

In an effort to identify employment options for the 40% of workshop participants that are over age 50, OPWDD will collaborate with the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) to identify employment and volunteer opportunities for this group of older adults. NYSOFA currently oversees the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) which helps job seekers who are over 55 years old and have limited incomes to improve their skills, obtain training and find a job. The goal of the program is for participants to gain the skills they need to find and sustain employment in the workforce.

SCSEP participants are placed in temporary assignments with federal, state, county, city, or nonprofit community organizations where they have an opportunity to sharpen and develop skills while searching for a permanent job. The temporary training assignments pay at least minimum wage. While in the program, participants are classified as being on temporary training status and are not employees of the host agency as the goal of SCSEP is to help prepare individuals for their next step into competitive employment.

OPWDD and NYSOFA have discussed a potential partnership where retirement aged individuals transitioning from a workshop could apply for SCSEP upon completion of Pathway to Employment. We have also discussed connecting seniors transitioning from workshops to retirement services funded by NYSOFA. OPWDD services like Community Habilitation, Self Direction or Day Habilitation could be used to support an individual with developmental disabilities interested in participating in NYSOFA services.

Additional opportunities for interagency collaboration will be available as a result of the newly created Employment First Commission. On September 17, 2014, Governor Andrew Cuomo issued Executive Order #136 establishing the New York Employment First Initiative to increase employment of New Yorkers with disabilities. The initiative creates an "Employment First Commission" to provide guidance and advice regarding integrated employment of individuals with disabilities.

The Commission members include the Governor's Deputy Secretary for Health; the Governor's Deputy Secretary for Civil Rights; the Governor's Deputy Secretary for Human Services; the Chief Diversity Officer; the Counsel to the Governor; the Director of the Budget; the Commissioner for Developmental Disabilities; the Commissioner of Health; the Commissioner of Mental Health; the Commissioner of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services; the Commissioner of Children and Family Services; the Commissioner of Labor; the Commissioner of Economic Development; the Commissioner of Transportation; the Commissioner of Temporary and Disability Assistance; the Director of Veterans' Affairs; the Director of the State Office for Aging; and the Executive Director of the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs and others appointed by the Governor. The Commission will also work with the Department of Education.

The purpose of the Commission is to make recommendations by March 1, 2015 on how to improve competitive employment outcomes for all individuals with disabilities. The duties of the Commission include the following:

- a. Review available employment supports and services, including opportunities to align their policies and procedures to enhance access to such supports and services;
- b. Identify policies and procedures that create barriers or disincentives for employment of individuals with disabilities and ways to reduce or eliminate such barriers or disincentives;

- c. Ensure that the state's workforce development strategy provides for individuals with disabilities, including strategies to maximize opportunities to hire individuals with disabilities in the private sector, the public sector, and in entities contracting with the state;
- d. Prioritize opportunities for students with disabilities transitioning from educational settings to competitive integrated employment as the first option; and
- e. Expand the use of data to measure employment of New Yorkers with disabilities and develop a mechanism for reporting such data.

#### **(6) Assisting individuals with significant behavioral or medical needs in preparing for and moving towards integrated employment**

Governor Cuomo and the New York State Legislature made great strides in helping individuals with developmental disabilities to engage in competitive employment with the enactment of Chapter 58 of the Laws of 2014 which expands the Nurse Practice Act exemption for certified settings. This legislation directs OPWDD to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the State Education Department on procedures authorizing appropriately trained Direct Support Professionals to administer medication and perform other duties in non-certified settings such as a workplace. This welcome change will provide individuals with developmental disabilities with more opportunities to work and live independently in the community instead of having their lifestyle and career choices limited by the availability of a registered nurse.

OPWDD is also exploring the use of group employment for individuals with medical and behavioral needs. Group employment is when supported employment services and training activities are provided in regular business, industry and community settings for groups of two or more. Examples include mobile crews and other business-based workgroups employing small groups of workers with disabilities. Such supports must be provided in a manner that promotes integration into the workplace and interaction between employees with developmental disabilities and other employees. This would enable support staff to be on the job with individuals as needed. Community habilitation is also being explored as an option for individuals who need personal care while on the job.

#### **(7) Technical assistance, compliance and transition assistance procedures for existing providers who seek to transition to competitive and/or integrated employment models**

While there are 113 workshops currently in New York, several providers have already had success transitioning individuals from workshops to competitive employment through a combination of individual and group job placements in the community and in businesses owned and operated by voluntary agencies. OPWDD will work with workshop providers interested in restructuring their business model to create businesses in the larger community that create opportunities for workshop participants to engage in competitive employment. As plans are developed to create community businesses, OPWDD will work with providers to ensure that these businesses meet the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver definition of community settings. Provider owned and operated community businesses will complement not replace individual and group job placements within private sector businesses. This

strategy is being utilized to ensure that workshop participants have opportunities to choose from a variety of competitive employment options.

In an effort to further improve competitive employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities, New York joined the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). SELN is a cross-state cooperative venture of state ID/DD agencies that are committed to improving employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities. The SELN helps states enhance their capacity to develop, implement, and support effective integrated employment initiatives designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. As OPWDD learns about promising practices in other states, this information will be used to develop technical assistance and guidance to supported employment providers in New York.

### **(8) Assessment of funding and necessary supports for individuals and providers**

OPWDD recognizes that providers must be adequately funded if they are to provide comprehensive supported employment services. OPWDD is currently working with the Department of Health to create a new supported employment billing and fee structure that more accurately reflects the true costs associated with helping individuals find and retain employment.

In addition, the New York State Department of Health collaborated with OPWDD, the New York State Office for the Aging, and the New York State Office of Mental Health to submit a Balancing Incentive Program (BIP) application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in December 2012. The State's application was approved, and on March 15, 2013, New York State was awarded \$598.7 million to help integrate individuals into the community. The BIP Transformation Fund offers a unique opportunity to engage New York's broad network of highly qualified developmental disabilities providers, advocates and local governments in developing systemic improvements that address barriers encountered when working to transform the system of care for individuals with developmental disabilities.

BIP Transformation funding must be spent on community-based initiatives that increase offerings, choice or access to non-institutional services including self-directed options, employment and community housing options. OPWDD will award part of the funding to applicants who demonstrate how the proposed initiative will impact the transition into competitive employment. Specifically, successful applicants will create programs increasing the number of individuals engaged in competitive employment including supporting the transition of individuals from traditional day habilitation and sheltered workshop programs to competitive employment. Proposals may focus on the following:

- Providing vocational assessments to working age individuals currently receiving day habilitation and workshop services that identify the types of supports needed to assist in obtaining competitive employment.
- Developing person-centered transition plans for workshop and day habilitation participants that detail how supports will be provided to assist individuals in obtaining competitive employment.
- Developing peer mentoring networks to support day habilitation and workshop participants as they transition to competitive employment.

- Developing strategies to create self employment opportunities for workshop and day habilitation participants through the operation of a business.
- Providing technical assistance and support to assist workshop providers to convert to competitive employment business models consistent with the HCBS waiver definition of community settings.
- Developing strategies for retirement age workshop participants to engage in meaningful senior, recreational or social activities.

### **Stakeholder Input**

OPWDD convened twelve Community Dialogue Sessions across the state between the months of August and October, 2014. Over 300 families, providers, self -advocates and individuals receiving workshop services provided input on the Employment Transformation Plan approved by CMS. OPWDD also solicited input on the Employment Plan from the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council. These sessions were a follow up to the eight Community Dialogues convened in September 2013 when the OPWDD developed the Employment Plan.

A summary of stakeholder comments from the 2014 Community Dialogues is contained in Appendix B. Several stakeholders raised concerns about the decision to eliminate funding for workshops and expressed a desire for workshops to remain open. Concerns were raised about the need for alternative service options, the impact of workshop closure on individuals and families, the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities to be safe and accepted in the community and the need for transportation. There were also recommendations for strategies that could be used to create employment opportunities for individuals transitioning from workshops, including the following:

- Support workshop providers ability to create businesses that comply with the new HCBS settings regulations as an employment option for individuals that may not be successful in obtaining employment in private industry.
- Examine the possibility of adapting federal contracting requirements related to hiring individuals with disabilities to achieve state goals.
- Explore opportunities for start-up funding for providers to develop alternative business models that would create integrated employment opportunities.
- Develop additional incentives for businesses to hire individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Increase coordination with transportation systems to support job recruitment and retention.
- Educate New Yorkers about the right of people with disabilities to live and work in the community using Public Services Announcements and social media.

### **Conclusion**

OPWDD recognizes that transforming New York's service delivery system to ensure that residents with developmental disabilities work and live in integrated settings may cause anxiety for those who are concerned about what services will be available for loved ones. OPWDD remains committed to working with individuals, families, providers and the legislature to ensure that their needs are met. The six-year time frame allotted for changing the sheltered workshop model will enable New York to continue learning from our experience and from its experiences, of other states so that any necessary adjustments to the employment plan can be adopted as new information and data becomes available. New Yorkers

with developmental disabilities can thrive working alongside nondisabled peers and receiving a fair wage and OPWDD, with individuals, parents, providers, and advocates, will continue to develop strategies to maximize these opportunities.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Mental Hygiene Law § 13.41**

§ 13.41 Integrated employment plan.

- (a) The commissioner, in consultation with the developmental disabilities advisory council, shall establish a plan to increase employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities. The plan shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) identification of strategies to increase competitive employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, including students transitioning from educational programs;
- (2) data concerning job retention among individuals with developmental disabilities and the identification of strategies to increase job retention;
- (3) identification of models of integrated employment promoting, to the greatest extent possible, individuals with developmental disabilities working alongside individuals without disabilities, including considerations of ability levels, critical life transitions and appropriate options;
- (4) strategies for assisting individuals in transitioning from sheltered workshop programs to competitive employment;
- (5) partnerships with business communities and senior services to assist in increasing the availability of competitive employment for older adults;
- (6) identification of means to assist individuals with significant behavioral or medical needs in preparing for and moving towards integrated employment;
- (7) technical assistance, compliance and transition assistance procedures for existing providers who seek to transition to competitive and/or integrated employment models; and
- (8) assessments of funding and necessary supports for individuals and providers.

- (b) The commissioner, in consultation with the developmental disabilities advisory council, shall develop the plan with input from stakeholders, including individuals with developmental disabilities, parents and guardians of individuals with developmental disabilities, advocates and providers of services for individuals with developmental disabilities.
- (c) The plan required pursuant to this section shall be developed and submitted to the temporary president of the senate and speaker of the Assembly and posted on the website of the office for people with developmental disabilities within one hundred eighty days of the centers for Medicare and Medicaid services' approval of the plan to increase competitive employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Feedback from the 2014 Community Dialogues on Employment**

In preparation for the Community Dialogues a solicitation was sent to various provider, parent, self - advocate associations. Throughout the sessions, OPWDD specifically requested feedback on the following:

1. Funding and/or programmatic strategies that could assist in the successful implementation of the Employment Transformation Plan.
2. Strategies that could support delivery of the new Pathway to Employment service which is designed to assist individuals receiving OPWDD services with the successful transition to integrated competitive employment.
3. Models of integrated employment that promote opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to be employed in the community.
4. Strategies to assist individuals with significant behavioral or medical needs who are interested in obtaining integrated competitive employment.
5. Strategies to engage individuals, who will not be transitioning to competitive employment, into other meaningful community activities.
6. Strategies to better coordinate and/or provide transportation that will enable individuals to travel to employment opportunities.
7. Technical assistance that could help providers in transitioning to business models consistent with the Home and Community Based Settings (HCBS) Waiver regulation definition of “community settings.”

The dates and locations for the community dialogues were as follows:

- August 20<sup>th</sup>, Western NY
- August 21<sup>st</sup>, Finger Lakes
- August 26<sup>th</sup>, Staten Island
- September 9<sup>th</sup>, Hudson Valley
- September 12<sup>th</sup>, Taconic
- September 17<sup>th</sup>, Queens
- September 18<sup>th</sup>, Bronx and Manhattan
- September 22<sup>nd</sup>, Long Island
- October 1<sup>st</sup>, Binghamton
- October 6<sup>th</sup>, Syracuse and Brooklyn
- October 7<sup>th</sup>, Capital District

The public comments from the twelve Community Dialogue sessions can be categorized as follows:

- Concerns were raised regarding the availability of job opportunities and adequate transportation in some regions of the state.
- OPWDD was urged to provide adequate training to staff, technical support to providers, and to help publicize the availability of tax credits and the benefits of community inclusion.
- Some believed the status quo should be preserved and believed the system should remain unchanged, particularly for those who have been attending workshops for many years.
- Self-advocates recognized the need to reform workshops and asked parents to be more supportive of workshop transition.
- Questions were raised about the adequacy of services for those that will not be able to successfully transition to competitive employment.
- Some questions were raised regarding program funding and technical aspects of interacting with programs from other agencies.