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Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor



Courtney Burke  
Commissioner



News and Information from the New York State  
Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

# People First



November 2011



## A Letter from the Commissioner

### Dear Friends and Colleagues:

On April 11, 2011, the New York State Senate confirmed my nomination as commissioner of OPWDD. In the six months since, OPWDD has undergone many changes, and I am pleased to have released our first report chronicling progress and next steps.

We have engaged individuals, families, employees, advocates, and others, and their guidance, criticisms on deficiencies, and suggestions for best practices have positively impacted virtually every aspect of our operations. Their participation has been essential and greatly appreciated. So much of our system is rooted in the advocacy of parents in decades past—and so is our future.

Some changes were obvious: strengthening our workforce through targeted recruitment and effective training; partnering with law enforcement to clean up our system and ensure that those who abuse individuals in our care are held accountable; and making information more transparent and available to the public. Others were less so, but equally important: standardizing expectations for our vast system of nonprofit providers; and creating a culture of consistent self-evaluation and anticipating future needs.

We are at a critical juncture. I believe it is incumbent on the agency to scrutinize itself. Creating good policies and practices is just part of the obligation—we must also make sure they work, and change direction when they do not. Over the next six months, we will dedicate ourselves to tracking initial reforms, making operations more transparent, and strengthening our entire system.

The 1115 People First Waiver is one significant change taking shape. Simply put, the waiver will give us the ability to meet our vision of providing new flexibility and options for people in our care. Like the community-based residential opportunities that grew out of the Willowbrook scandal in the 1970s, this waiver will empower individuals to decide what services and programs they need to live the life they choose, ending the “one-size-fits-all” approach. This month, we will draft our application for the waiver, which will be made available on [www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011\\_waiver/index.jsp](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011_waiver/index.jsp); there will also be a feature in our December newsletter.

I thank the many members of our community and workforce, as well as the public, legislature, and media who have gone to great lengths to ensure that government keeps its commitment to our state’s most vulnerable individuals. I look forward to our continued partnership with stakeholders to implement many additional improvements currently in the works, and sharing our progress in the months ahead.

Sincerely,

Courtney Burke, Commissioner



## Issue Highlights

Six-month report

Standardized Fire Safety Regulations

Works for Me

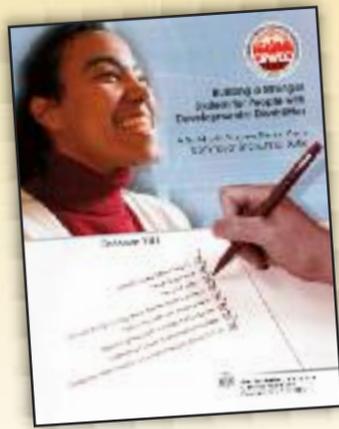
Federal Grant for employment

Waiver Update: Waiver family videos

Recipe Sharing for holidays

Hundreds Attend Waiver Briefings

State Employees: Save On Your Cell Phone Bill



## Six Month Progress Report: OPWDD Reports on Strengthening New York System of Care for People With Developmental Disabilities

In October, Commissioner Burke released a six-month progress report outlining this administration's efforts to reform New York's vast system of care for its more than 126,000 individuals with developmental disabilities and improve efforts to keep people safe while in care.

Since her confirmation by the State Senate in April, OPWDD has implemented several major reforms, overhauling virtually every aspect of the agency's operations, including hiring, discipline, and service opportunities for people receiving the agency's support.

She noted, "OPWDD's obligation to protect the health and safety of the individuals in our care needed broad, deep, and meaningful reform. Some of our initiatives will take time. But we have made great strides in the first six months that are making this system safer today."

The report, which is available on [www.opwdd.ny.gov](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov), or by sending an email request to [chloe.x.mister@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:chloe.x.mister@opwdd.ny.gov), outlines several areas of key progress:

- Increasing the percentage of physical abuse allegations that have been reported to law enforcement from 16 percent to 93 percent, and the percentage of sexual abuse allegations reported to police from 75 percent to 98 percent;
- Holding nonprofit providers (that provide nearly 80 percent of OPWDD's services) accountable for safety, fiscal, and governance deficiencies in their operations;

- Partnering with the Office of Fire Control and Prevention to ensure external controls and oversight of fire safety at group homes. Additionally, for the first time, standardizing fire safety practices at all state and nonprofit homes, including smoking policies, unannounced observations of evacuations and fire drills, and minimum requirements on fire safety training and drill reporting.
- Strengthening hiring practices to require, for the first time, that every new employee pass a rigorous system of checks that includes mandatory drug, and psychological fitness testing; and
- Nearly doubling the number of OPWDD employees whose termination the agency is seeking because they have been found guilty of abuse and neglect.

Burke concluded, "Our first six months have focused largely on shoring up every aspect of OPWDD's role as an oversight agency. That included how we hire, train, support, and hold the workforce accountable, as well as improving operations internally and throughout our vast network of nonprofit providers. We will continue to enact health and safety measures, and also work closely with our partners across the system to improve the care we provide and to create new opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and the employees dedicated to this service."

## OPWDD Honors Businesses and Employees at Annual Works For Me Event

Committed to creating new opportunities and programs for individuals with developmental disabilities to find gainful employment, OPWDD honored five exceptional New York State businesses and the employees who are getting the job done.

On October 26, 2011, OPWDD held its fourth annual Works For Me celebration at The Egg Center for the Performing Arts in Albany. FOX23 Albany Anchor John Gray served as master of ceremonies. Approximately 120 people attended the event, which was catered by Kingsboro Catering from Lexington Center (Fulton ARC) in Gloversville.

Commissioner Courtney Burke said, "We are committed to providing new choices and opportunities for the individuals receiving our support. Currently, more than 9,000 individuals with developmental disabilities are employed statewide. We are looking to double that number in the years to come. Not only do individuals benefit from gainful employment in an integrated setting, but we hear from company after company about the benefits to their bottom line, too."



## 2011 Honorees are:

### Nonprofit/Government Employer of the Year: Staten Island Children's Museum, Staten Island

For more than 35 years, the Staten Island Children's Museum (SICM) has nurtured children's natural curiosity and creativity, recognizing and celebrating many different learning styles with a hands-on approach to education. For 10 of those years, Jacqueline Bouquio has worked both as a public affairs assistant for membership and public relations, and as a museum educator, entertaining both guests and staff alike.

Addy Manipella, director of education at SICM, said, "Jackie is incredibly bright; a very warm and giving person. Everyone loves her—and everyone respects her, which is actually sometimes even more important than liking someone because it comes from a whole other place. Jackie is just thought of as another employee, another staff member."



### Small Employer of the Year: Mayerson, Stutman, Abramowitz, LLP, New York City

Founded in 1998, Mayerson, Stutman, Abramowitz, LLP in Manhattan employs just 17 people at its Madison Avenue law firm. Among their employees is Bryan Merandi, who has worked as a mail services clerk for more than four years and is considered one of the most loyal, dedicated, and conscientious employees at the firm.

Michael Stutman, partner, said, "If we need to find something and we need to find it quickly, we rely pretty heavily on Bryan's ability to do that. We are thrilled with the results of his work. He has become a valuable and integral part of the operation. I really don't know how well we would do without him at this point."



### Medium Employer of the Year: Silver Dollar Optical, Oneonta, NY

Silver Dollar Optical designs and imports its own line of eyeglasses and distributes them throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. For more than 13 years, Ross Bromley has been employed in the company's shipping department as an exemplary employee whose job is essential to the company to keep the flow of operations going.

Dan Bliss, co-owner of Silver Dollar Optical, said, "It is hard to describe the importance Ross has to our company. He brings an uplifting and unique perspective to our operation. His job duties are an integral part of our day-to-day operations. Ross is a beloved member of our team and we are very glad to have him."



### Large Employer of the Year: Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, LLP, New York City

Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, LLP in New York City employs more than 700 people at its Avenue of the Americas headquarters, including Todd Irby-Ranniar, who for the past five years has worked as a rush messenger in the firm's Mail Service Department, delivering documents and packages to employees throughout the firm's 20 floors. He plays a vital role in the work of the business.

Joseph Noberini, Todd's supervisor, said, "You can pretty much set your clock by Todd; he is very dependable. If he takes a day off, it is as if one piece of the puzzle is missing in our office."



### Corporate Employer of the Year: Home Depot, Deer Park, NY

Since Home Depot first opened in Deer Park on Long Island, the store has been actively providing employment for people with developmental disabilities and promoting their abilities. Chona Fider has worked as a member of the store's stocking department for more than a year and is an integral part of the Home Depot team.

Anthony Gries, store manager, said, "I have nothing but great things to say about Chona. She is probably one of the more valued associates we have in the building. She is very clear on what she is supposed to be doing, as far as her job description. She has moved up from temporary associate to part-time associate; and she is a very hardworking individual."



## OPWDD Receives Federal Employment Grant

### Grant Will Help Launch New Programs for Youth and Young Adults to Find Employment

New York State is one of six states that has been awarded a Partnership in Employment System Change Grant, a multi-year grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families and Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The grant will be used to create partnerships to promote systems change efforts leading to the development of policies that support competitive employment in integrated settings for youth and adults with developmental disabilities.

New York State's grant will be administered by the Institute for Innovative Transition at the University of Rochester's Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities.

The project will create statewide and regional consortia of individuals with developmental disabilities, families, providers, public and private employers, state agencies,

universities, educators, and school districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and other partners that will collaboratively engage in systems change efforts that contribute to:

- Developing policies that support competitive employment in integrated settings as the first and desired outcome for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities;
- Removing systematic barriers to competitive employment in integrated settings;
- Implementing strategies and best practices that improve employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and
- Enhancing collaboration to facilitate the transition process from secondary school and other prevocational training settings to integrated employment settings.

The systems change effort will improve employment preparation for high school students; increase the number of students transitioning from high school to competitive, integrated employment while decreasing participation in day



habilitation programs and sheltered workshops; increase the number of young adults employed in competitive employment settings; and enhance cross-agency communication and collaboration. The effort will also lead to an Employment First policy in New York State with improved quality of life and independence for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Additional consortium partners include: Syracuse University's Burton Blatt Institute, Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, National Youth Leadership Network, Self Advocacy Association of New York State, New York State Independent Living Council, and Project SEARCH at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

## Recipe Sharing for the Holidays

The holiday season is upon us. If you are among the many people who enjoy cooking and/or baking for the holidays, we would love for you to share a recipe.

Email your favorite recipe to Nicole.Weinstein@opwdd.ny.gov by November 20 for inclusion in the December newsletter. If you have a story or photo to go along with your recipe, please send that, as well.

### Here's one to get you started:

#### Banana Suzanna

This is a delicious twist on a traditional breakfast bread. My children really like it when I add extra chocolate chips!

Tip: Try it as a dessert!

—Nicole Weinstein,  
OPWDD Communications

#### Ingredients:

- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (or more for a chocolaty treat!)
- 1¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 3 large, very ripe bananas
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup butter or shortening

#### Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, sugar, salt, and cinnamon.
3. Unwrap the butter and heat it in the microwave, in a microwave safe bowl, for about a minute, until it's thoroughly melted. Set it aside at room temperature to cool, but don't let it solidify again.

4. Peel the bananas. Using a potato masher, mash the bananas in a separate mixing bowl.
5. Add the vanilla extract to the mashed bananas.
6. Beat the eggs in a separate bowl and then add the beaten egg to the banana-vanilla mixture.
7. Thoroughly grease and flour a 9" x 5" x 3" baking pan.
8. Pour a tiny bit of the melted butter into the egg-banana-vanilla mixture and stir it in. Repeat 3-4 more times, adding a slightly larger amount of the liquid butter each time until it is all incorporated. Don't add hot melted butter to the egg-banana mixture as the heat from the butter would cook the egg, and that's not what you want!

9. Add the liquid ingredients to the dry ones and mix no more than 10 seconds. The batter will be visibly lumpy. That's OK! It's extremely important not to over mix the batter, or the bread will be too hard.
10. Once the liquid and dry ingredients have been combined, gently fold the chocolate chips into the batter.
11. Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan and bake immediately.
12. Bake 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean and the edge of the bread starts to separate from the pan. Makes one 9" x 5" x 3" loaf.

## People First Waiver Demonstration Application Update: Informational Videos



OPWDD is working closely with stakeholders, outside experts, other state agencies, and the governor's office to develop a federal 1115 research and demonstration waiver known as the People First Waiver. The new waiver will allow OPWDD to restructure our service system and improve our ability to be person-centered in our service planning and delivery. As work progresses on the development of this waiver, OPWDD has been working hard to bring information to the public. As part of the effort, Commissioner Burke has begun making brief video clips for the waiver webpage, in which she answers some of the questions people have been posing. To view these videos, which stem from frequently asked questions, visit [http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011\\_waiver/index.jsp](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011_waiver/index.jsp) and choose such video briefs as, "What is a DISCO?" and "Will I Lose Services?".





### Hundreds Attend Statewide People First Waiver Briefings

As part of her ongoing commitment to keep the public informed on the development of the People First Waiver, Commissioner Burke and OPWDD leadership hosted several informational briefings through October and early November to update stakeholders on waiver progress and answer any questions and concerns.

The People First Waiver will support OPWDD in its efforts to advance the developmental disabilities service system's capacity to deliver more quality, choice, and community engagement to those it supports. At the same time, the waiver will modernize fiscal,

administrative, and quality operations to ensure sustainability for years to come. The

People First Waiver will allow individuals with developmental disabilities and their families greater access to services, improved opportunities for choice, and more control over supports.

Over the past several months, OPWDD has been providing individuals, families, providers and others with many opportunities to meet with Commissioner Burke and her staff in an effort to gather information and recommendations on the waiver. In addition, the process also has included online opportunities to provide feedback.

The forums, in front of hundreds of attendees, occurred in Commack, New York City, Syracuse, Buffalo, and Poughkeepsie.

### Making Connections on Behalf of People: Residential Opportunity Committee

Capital District DDSO's residential opportunity committee also fondly known as the "ROC," was formed to assist individuals and their families who find themselves in critical situations and in need of residential service options. The committee meets monthly and is co-facilitated by Capital District DDSO placement coordinator Kim DePeaux and by a voluntary provider, presently Julianne Furlong from Saratoga Bridges. The committee members include representatives of each residential voluntary provider as well as a parent member and a self-advocate, Wendy Orzel. As each individual is introduced to the committee by their Medicaid service coordinator, social worker, family member or themselves, the committee is responsible for collaborating and brainstorming on the possibilities of finding a solution within the district and connecting the person to an agency for a residential opportunity.

This committee helps people make connections with agencies who offer residential service options. The approach is considered person centered,

in that, there is a focus on whom the person is, their abilities, interests and support needs in considering what residential option is to be considered. Options range from certified settings like family care homes/supportive (less than 24-hour staffing) and supervised (24-hour supervision) apartments to Individualized Residential Alternatives (IRA's) that provide 24-hour staffing with clinical support services. Uncertified options are considered an even more creative way to seek residential services. These types of options, offered by some agencies, include Individualized Supports and Services; which includes resources to contribute to costs for apartment rent and some living expenses combined with staffing support using community habilitation (staff) as needed. Some agencies will explore on behalf of the individual creating such arrangements as shared living and funded neighbor supports depending on the person's individual situation.

Although there continues to be many people who live at home and are in critical need of residential services, the committee's efforts are considered a success in the Capital District region based on the number of people who are registered on the Residential Request list, previously known as the New York state cares list, who have been connected to an agency and found a place to reside. In the first half of 2011, 80 Individuals found a new home to call their own. This a tribute to the voluntary providers, as well as to the Capital District DDSO staff who have embraced and supported the individuals when they were in critical need. The direct support professionals involved truly are critical to supporting the person to transition and in helping make their new house their home, where they feel valued and supported.

So we say "thank you" to everyone for the role they play in connecting people to places to live their life.

# Winter Word Search!



### Keeping People Safe: OPWDD Standardizes Fire Safety Practices

For the first time, OPWDD has standardized fire safety practices for both state-operated and voluntary-operated programs, issuing a directive on such items as smoking safety and evacuation drills that will provide consistency throughout our service delivery system.

Within the next three months, the agency's Division of Quality Management/Bureau of Program Certification, as well as the Office of Fire Prevention and Control will be adding these specific items to the survey and certification protocols.

Specific mandates include evacuation/fire drill frequency requirements; unannounced observation of fire drills/evacuation by administrative staff; problematic evacuation drills; smoking; sprinkler and fire alarm maintenance contracts; attic, crawl space and roofed porch heat detectors, architect's letter at a pre-opening site visit; and contact with local fire authority.

To read this important memorandum in full visit [www.opwdd.ny.gov/wt/memoranda/ADM-2011-02.pdf](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/wt/memoranda/ADM-2011-02.pdf)

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