

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
*Department of*  
*Developmental Services*

**COMMITTING TO EXCELLENCE:**  
*OUR VISION STORY*

**Morna A. Murray, J.D.**  
**Commissioner**  
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## A Word About Our Story

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Here's an important back story as to why and how the vision story that you are about to read came to be. It's vital that all DDS personnel understand this emerging reality. It will give our vision story a context for understanding. As you read the back story, you'll see that "*more of the same*" will not bring DDS to where it needs to be in order to best support individuals and families.

DDS has a long and complex history of ever-changing structures and supports. In an effort to respond to the needs of individuals and families, DDS has found itself reacting to new schools of thought by constantly shifting resources, building up new programs, and tearing down old ways of doing business. With each new approach, DDS has felt foundational shifts, both in how to deliver supports and how the agency itself operates. These approaches have often turned into "specializations," creating a false sense of separation among DDS team members.

At the same time, the Department's IT infrastructure has been challenged to keep up with these changing needs. As specific needs came up, specific solutions were implemented, leading to the ongoing use and maintenance of multiple programs and databases. This has often led to inconsistent data reporting, as well as overwhelming burdens of data entry for many frontline DDS team members. Although data is critical to our continued provision of supports, the data quality is often impacted by these issues.

In an effort to streamline, responsiveness has also been continuously pulled into Central Office and out of the field in recent years. With the shifting trend toward more integrated and individualized supports for those supported by DDS, this is no longer the optimal way to operate. Those in the field with direct contact and knowledge of the individuals we support are vital to person-centered planning and supports, and must be given the tools and opportunities necessary to best respond to individuals' needs and desires. In the same vein, these needs and desires most often cross between the "specializations" that have been built up into silos, which must now be better blended in the field.

Underpinning all of this is the reality of recent and current statewide budget constraints. This continues to present less than ideal circumstances, from caseloads at DDS to delivery of supports in the private sector, which has coped with an ongoing funding shortfall for service reimbursement. As the private sector delivers over 80% of our supports, this has led to the creation of waiting lists, as well as an unstable system of supports.

As one example of our historic challenges, conversations with DDS team members have brought to light challenges inherent in the Level of Need (LON)-based rate system of reimbursements to private service providers. Although this system was intended to create opportunity for flexibility and choice for the individuals supported, DDS leadership and staff have repeatedly cited the challenges that this system appears to create. From decreases in average wages for direct care workers, to instability for providers, to repeated changes to be tracked at DDS (within our multiple data systems), this system has lacked some of the key supports and flexibility needed by all DDS stakeholders at this time. In addition, DDS funding streams seem to have remained siloed and inflexible or unclear for application to alternative service models.

These issues continue to strain the DDS system by failing to break down silos to maximize resources and best support the individuals in need of our support. However, as we work to improve our own internal operations, we will also work toward long-term solutions for this and other issues to ensure a positive evolution for all elements of DDS.

What follows is our vision story. With **Committing to Excellence** as the theme, our story is one that is intentionally futuristic in tone, yet, written in the present tense as if we have already achieved what we are, just now, setting out to accomplish. The story is organized around the key elements that comprise every agency. We've attempted to make it vivid so that we can all see where we fit and how we can continue to contribute in the future of our agency.

And with that introduction, here is the Department of Developmental Services' vision of the future.

## Our Culture

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Organizational culture is comprised of the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that shape how we think and act. Every organization has its own unique culture. It evolves and adjusts with time. It's how "norms" are established and it's the way work is organized, executed and quality measured. Our culture at DDS has evolved like every organization does. In recent years, we have come to be characterized as bureaucratic, fiscally mismanaged and bifurcated in structure. We seemed to have lost our way and found ourselves facing systemic issues that get in the way of providing supports.

But, all of that has changed today. Rather, our organizational culture is now powerfully aligned with our service mission. Here are some of the ways that our efforts to change our culture have materialized:

- **"In it together" management style has taken hold.** The old ways of running our agency have given way to a new approach where leadership solicits ideas from the field and shares the responsibility of managing the work of the agency. There is less bureaucracy, less of a top down command and control structure, less separation and isolation among staff. Instead, there is more of a sense that we are all *"in it together."* Top management is there to set direction, create success and hold us accountable overall. But rigor, discipline, innovation and teamwork are encouraged closest to where the work is actually performed.
- **An "outside-in" perspective informs our behavior.** At DDS, as we always have, we put the individuals we support first. We strive to see our policies and procedures through the eyes of the individuals and families we support and consider the impact of our work on our providers, as well. By renewing this "outside-in" perspective, we have forged a social contract with our stakeholders – one that helps us to get it right the first time and avoid costly mistakes and rework. In fact, we have put devices in place that allow us to routinely seek outside counsel and input as a means of setting policy, introducing change, and evaluating change for effectiveness.
- **Task Forces and Meetings have shifted from exercises in pro forma activity to essential ways of getting things done.** There was a rich history of conducting meetings and establishing task forces to demonstrate a commitment to collaboration. However, in many instances, those meetings and task forces never yielded results, leaving participants with the feeling that they didn't have a voice. That has changed in today's DDS. True collaboration has been emphasized and has matured into a value that underpins all Agency decision-making and direction-setting. Meetings and task forces are results-based and supported by agency leadership.
- **We have learned to overcome today's tough economic realities through an emphasis on fiscal responsibility in the field.** Budgets are tighter than ever before and past years' deficits are still being managed through. However, by placing a renewed emphasis on the fiscal health of DDS, we have found ways to support more individuals. We have focused on becoming more efficient in managing available funding by improving work processes for field-level personnel to allow better data reporting to flow as a by-product. Indeed, we have been shifting our financial models toward better managing the cost of supports provided to the individuals we support, by focusing on fiscal management that allows a 360-degree view of individuals and their supports.
- **Just-in-time training has improved performance and increased DDS capabilities.** Training has been inconsistent and has not been delivered in a timely fashion at the agency in the past – leading to the squandering of those investments. Consequently, required skills and capabilities began to stagnate and performance suffered. At the same time, training resources diminished, as mandatory training requirements increased. Today's focus is to provide needed training just in time to put that training to good use, with flexibility to respond to the changing needs of the workforce. This simple adjustment has enabled the agency's training dollars to go further than ever before.

## Our Organizational Structure

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Organizational structure defines the way work is done and managed. A decentralized organizational structure had been in place within the agency for years. But, it had been consistently shrunk as shared services became centralized. The process of centralization led to inconsistencies and difficulties in managing the delivery of supports to our recipients. So, something had to change. Today's DDS is organized to optimize the balance between autonomy of the field and the control required to efficiently run an agency. Here are some of the key characteristics of the transformation that has taken place.

- ***A networked organizational design has provided stability and improved performance.*** Re-thinking the outdated "command and control" structures from DDS of the past has enabled the agency to become more nimble and quick. The networked organizational structure shifts work to where it can be most efficiently performed enabling greater stability and performance.
- ***A team-based structure at regional offices delivers better results.*** By distributing work and responsibilities in way that puts responsiveness closer to where supports are delivered, the agency has been able to field a more empowered and productive workforce – enabling the "right" decisions to be made at the "right" time. Field office staff with cross-discipline talent enables the agency to leverage all of its skills and expertise on an "as needed" basis in order to deliver the best results for the individuals we support. A level of cross-training has also occurred in the field as a natural by-product of this organizational design.
- ***A virtual crisis escalation capability has provided relief in the field.*** The design of a cross-agency escalation process, known as START (**S**ystem-wide **T**riage and **R**esponse **T**eam) for dealing with field-level crisis, has provided quicker response for the individuals we support and reduced some of the challenges that come with our field work.
- ***Better field-level reporting has been achieved by sharing the responsibility through the organizational network design.*** The work of the agency includes managing its finances and data in a timely and accurate way. The re-distribution of work and substantial reconsideration of how data is stored and managed has placed a renewed emphasis on having our field staff accurately report on their case work, in particular, by giving them the appropriate tools to do so. With improved work processes, DDS team members in the field and in regional offices share the agency's fiscal responsibility and maintain accountability for service delivery spending.

## Our Team

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DDS has felt the impact of recent retirements and organizational reassignments. It has experienced this impact through a diminishing workforce, as well as, a loss of agency knowledge. Yet, DDS team members continue to confront these challenges through their hard work and dedication. In response to the changes:

- **Leadership engages staff and empowers performance.** Gone are the days where unilateral decisions are made from on high. Instead, a new focus on empowerment, with oversight, has yielded an organization that can make field-level decisions in a timely and accurate way. Field-level staff are supported by leadership, as well as improved systems and work processes, in doing their jobs, better enabling them to capture and report case-level information that can be leveraged by Central Office and Regions to better manage the agency (and provide even greater empowerment of field-level personnel).
- **Work has moved closer to the individuals we support in a team-based fashion.** The new, networked organizational structure has moved workers closer to the action and cross-discipline teams deliver better results in the field, supported by both regional and Central Office leadership. Consequently, silos have been broken down and work is more fluid and flexible. All of this has enabled DDS line staff to better respond to challenges as they arise and quickly redeploy the “right” resources to meet the evolving needs of the individuals we support.
- **Our team-based model enables a “one-stop shopping” experience.** The individuals we support are no longer passed from unit to unit to get their needs met, rather, in the spirit of “no wrong door,” a one-stop shopping experience is now being delivered by the agency. This has occurred because the cross-discipline teams in the field have learned to work together and to deliver more creative and effective results to the individuals we support.
- **Field staff recognize the importance of their part in the agency’s fiscal management.** The agency cannot run if field-level information is not available for proper processing and financial management. Since work is moving closer to the individuals we support, a renewed emphasis on field-level data collection and reporting has been put into place, along with the systems needed to facilitate this important work. Work process improvement has focused on streamlining the work of field staff so that they may provide supports to individuals and information to DDS at the same time. Our field staff recognize the importance of their part in this process and have assumed the responsibility to do it well.

## Our Work Processes

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In addition to a new structure, **our work processes** have been reimagined to allow team members to do their work in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

- **Paper processing is streamlined or eliminated.** Where paper processes continue, they have been redesigned to minimize handling and storage. A one-pass system is in place for most major functions including intake, assessment, placement and case management. Leveraging existing document management technologies has enabled better workflow and allows information on individuals supported to be accessible to those who need it. DDS has become a place where paper processing is the exception rather than the rule.
- **Business processes are redesigned as "whole jobs."** With the silos eliminated, we organize and do our work in a way where the "whole job" can be performed with fewer steps and less delay. Streamlined work processes have eliminated inefficiencies, unnecessary redundancies, hand-offs and non-value added work steps. New organizational design constructs have led to greater empowerment, team-based structures and new escalation practices (the START process).
- **Business processes are effectively documented & communicated.** A closer knit and interactive workforce more clearly understands what is expected, individually and as a whole. Core business processes and procedures are explicitly documented and widely communicated. Easily accessible information and training rapidly integrates new or reassigned employees into the fold – enabling greater productivity in a shorter period of time.
- **Each process generates management information as a direct by-product.** Because of better information management, DDS has become a true learning organization. We no longer make the same mistake twice. Instead, we leverage past experiences and learn from them. Every work process generates strategic information needed to manage, measure and improve what we do. This information grows out of and feeds back into our work in planned and meaningful ways. Measuring, evaluating, reporting and improving have become part of our agency's lexicon, as we have developed a renewed focus on quality improvement.
- **Processes are designed to leverage and share information with our sister agencies.** Clearly, there is a symbiotic relationship among us and our sister agencies, including the Office of Policy and Management, the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Social Services. Our processes have now been redesigned to properly share and leverage information among the agencies with which we work.

## Our Management System

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Work processes contribute directly to **our management system**. This allows all team members to deliver the right information to allow management and leadership to make decisions.

- **Measures align with objectives.** Our agency vision is constantly being translated into action and meaningful measures aligned with our shared objectives. Our measures are collaboratively developed and widely understood. These measures, or metrics, are quantitative and qualitative. They address the accuracy, effectiveness, timeliness, quality and results of our performance well beyond process and production statistics. A focus on continuous quality improvement allows us to assess results and fine tune our operations where necessary. We are all part of helping the individuals we support achieve their goals in the most efficient and cost-effective way that allows us to help as many individuals as possible with limited resources.
- **Performance metrics derive from the real work we do.** Too often, performance has been measured in ways largely disconnected from our work. At DDS, our business processes now capture key performance metrics as a by-product of what we do. Our measures of productivity and performance are aligned with overall agency objectives. Our staff works with the knowledge that they are empowered and accountable in a way that directly relates to what they contribute to our success.
- **Timeliness and accuracy are key metrics.** The field generally believed that the agency's fiscal responsibilities were someone else's to worry about. But, that has changed. There's now a strong recognition that because the action takes place in the field, fiscal responsibility resides there, too. Among the ways we hold ourselves accountable to each other and to the public is through timely and accurate data reporting. The better this has become, the better the agency has become.

## Our Technological Capacity

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Underpinning these work processes and management systems is **our technological capacity**.

- **Better financial systems improve decision-making.** The data needed to run the agency has improved significantly. The need to merge and migrate data from various sources has been addressed and a management reporting platform has been established that delivers reliable results in less than half the time of past years.
- **Improved automation has increased productivity and provides a platform for improved service delivery.** An integrated systems infrastructure accessible from central office, the regions and the field has enabled faster communication throughout and quicker turnaround – all leading to better results for the DDS service recipient. This environment gives us the ability to make customized information more available internally and externally. It also provides a common platform for improved execution.
- **Our systems enable cross-agency sharing.** Designed with modularity and flexibility in mind, our technical platform can now adapt and flex as the agency evolves and grows. Key processing areas are able to handle high volume without workarounds or overload. Systems navigation is simple and seamless and feeds our management reporting and cross-agency data sharing environment.
- **Robust systems provide for enhanced case management.** Our “outside-in” perspective makes the individuals that we support, not the service, our central purpose. A new suite of DDS information systems have been designed to incorporate case management into our other core systems. Case information about the individuals that we support is continuously updated in real time. Controls are in place to assure privacy and security. Now, field-level staff can spend their time as problem-solvers and service providers and less time on paperwork.
- **Document management systems are leveraged to reduce paper processing.** Digitizing our data and enabling point-of-contact data capture has enhanced our ability to get things done. The use of document management tools enables efficient transaction processing and deepens our data management capabilities. Instead of having information locked up in physical files, document management tools provide critical information about the individual and their supports to all of the DDS staff who need it to optimize quality service delivery.
- **Work-flow software improves outcomes.** To the greatest extent possible, we have built-in automated workflow support to ensure that nothing “drops through the cracks” – enhancing the experience for the individuals that we support and helping providers deliver their supports unencumbered by system delays or process inefficiencies.

## Our Communications Infrastructure

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Equally important to data and technology is **our communications infrastructure**.

- **DDS better assists the individuals that need our supports through improved communication.** The agency's leadership team works diligently to keep lines of communications open and active with those who make and influence public policy. We provide timely communication, reliable data and meaningful analysis. We understand that our policies must support and align with federal and state requirements, while maintaining a fiscally responsible approach to our service delivery.
- **DDS enables change through the engagement of providers.** Providers are our partners in service delivery – without them, we struggle. Communicating more widely about what we do and plan to do is paramount to keeping them on-board and engaged. We want to share our knowledge and experience, but we are also open to better ideas and enhanced collaboration.
- **DDS becomes a trusted partner within state government through increased reporting accuracy.** We "push" timely, customized information out to our governmental constituents. We also make it available on-line and on demand for individuals and families who prefer to "pull" general information or account information themselves. Our communications are more informative than descriptive, more friendly and less legalistic, visual as well as literal, and amplified by access through the widest possible array of social media. Every contact with individuals and families is an opportunity to capture information in order to create networks for information dissemination and two-way communication.
- **Outcomes and continuous improvement drive us.** Every staff member, in every part of DDS, is involved in continuous improvement. We are all working toward delivering impeccable supports to our constituents and the sharing of information enables better results.
- **Effective internal communication makes the work of the agency easier to perform.** By providing timely and accurate information about our work, we have created an environment where work can be done without criticism or compromise. We trust each other and feel that we are all "in it together."
- **Improved communications allows workers to work with management to get things done.** Of course, collective bargaining issues are left to collective bargaining. However, management and staff continuously share their ideas in collaborative ways. Open and honest communications has enabled a level of trust to emerge within the agency that helps us to deliver impeccable service to individuals and families.
- **External communications enhances trust and restores pride in the work that we do.** We are much more proactive and creative in assisting the individuals that we support and outside providers. A "go where they are" approach uses all kinds of media connections and outreach. We see the results in improved results and greater support of our agency by the press and by the citizens of Connecticut.
- **Inter-agency relationships are improved through enhanced communications.** Specifically, agencies like DSS, OPM and DAS are vital to our agency's long-term success. Communications becomes a way to re-cast our relationships with our sister agencies, improving the flow of data/information in support of the mutual fiscal/operational needs of the state.

## Our Best Practices

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Embedded in everything that DDS does is a commitment to best practices.

- ***The DDS Vision Story provides the context needed to make informed decisions.*** Our vision reflects our mission and informs our strategic planning. It guides our strategic thinking and helps us to better screen new ideas and new ways of doing business. Indeed, it gives us the context to make the best decisions for our agency.
- ***Comprehensive strategic planning is institutionalized.*** All of our work is rooted in the strategic plan. In this way, our precious resources are not wasted on effort that that does not help the agency achieve its vision for the future. It is ongoing and continuous strategic planning that grounds DDS and focuses us on the right things. We know where we are going and have a plan to get there.
- ***Re-fashioned operating governance sets clear direction on how we work.*** DDS has formal operating principles and practices in place that govern the agency. Everyone knows the “rules of the road” that clearly describe what is expected of them and what they have a right to expect from others. Key among these principles is that everyone has specific responsibilities and that they will be held accountable to deliver on those duties.
- ***A project management mentality has yielded a learning organization.*** Training and practice has nurtured a project management mindset all across the agency. We work as teams comprised of the right skills and experience to deliver sound results to the individuals we support. Expectations for on-time delivery, managing to schedules and sharing in meaningful accomplishments are clearly understood and have resulted in an ever more engaged workforce. In this way, the agency has become a learning organization, one where individuals learn and grow through the work that they accomplish together.

## And With That...

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This concludes our vision story.

We trust that you found it both informative and engaging. Most importantly, though, we hope that you can see yourself in our future.

Clearly, we need *all hands on deck* to accomplish the aggressive transformation outlined above. We know that, together, we can make it our reality.

### *What Happens Next?*

We intend to continue to socialize our vision and help our stakeholders understand where we're heading – describing to them how we intend to get there and what they can do to engage with us on our journey into the future.

We will need to establish a detailed strategic plan that outlines the key initiatives needed to achieve our vision. This work will extend the current plan and realign it with our vision story. But, unlike the current plan, we will outline clear projects and programs needed to transform. These projects and programs will be put on timelines and structures will be put into place to drive and maintain the plan.

We will be calling on many of you to participate in these efforts. We know that by engaging you in our change process we will get there. Indeed, together, we will be ***committing to excellence!***