



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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April 10, 2013

Robin Wood, Director
Family Support Strategies and Advocacy
Department of Developmental Services
460 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Robin:

This is to support the application that the Department of Developmental Services and the Council on Developmental Disabilities are jointly submitting to participate in the National Community of Practice project being sponsored by the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS). By all appearances, this will be a wonderful opportunity to explore the “community of practice” approach to developing better ways to support individuals with disabilities and their families across the lifespan.

The challenges we face at both the State and national levels are daunting: the likelihood of continuing, perhaps indefinite fiscal retrenchment; the need to develop a new generation of safeguards amidst shifting paradigms of support (paradigms that increasingly emphasize self-direction, encourage self-advocacy, and yet also depend heavily on continuing family involvement); growing numbers of applicants waiting for relevant supports while, at the same time, the population currently receiving residential services ages and needs additional attention and resources. And these are only some of those daunting challenges – there are many others as well.

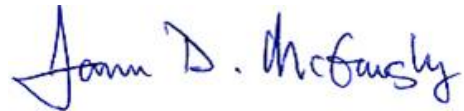
Many decades ago Connecticut faced a similar convergence of apparently intractable challenges. Students with disabilities were routinely excluded from school, or marginalized and consigned to one-size-fits-all basement classrooms where they prepared for dismal futures as clients in sheltered workshops. Adults were being warehoused in life-wasting institutions. Throughout the State and the nation, buildings were being built, public transportation and communication media were expanding without any thought being given to accessibility. And, perhaps worst of all, families were being pulled apart by policies and practices that heartlessly rewarded abandonment and punished loving commitment.

Fortunately, during the 1960s and 1970s, leaders emerged in the disability rights, education and human service reform movements in Connecticut who were able to see, and then work toward the common good. To a remarkable degree, they laid aside parochial concerns and came together to learn from and with each other, and to support a mutual quest for better things. Ideas that had helped in one arena were examined and adapted to others; experts and resources from across the country were identified and tapped; universal principles and core values were articulated and adopted. And, as these things happened, Connecticut began to recognize opportunities amidst its maze of seemingly insurmountable problems and to pursue positive change.

While the specific strategies those early leaders developed and successfully employed decades ago are not likely to be directly applicable today, their personal openness to each other and their willingness to engage in collaborative learning processes serve as an enduring example of the benefits of coming together in what we now recognize as an informal “community of practice”. We are at a point where we can benefit from renewing our commitment to this approach. NASDDDS’ National Community of Practice offers an opportunity to do just that. I have no doubt that a team from Connecticut could both contribute to, and learn deeply from the opportunity that participation would afford.

If our Office can be of further help in your pursuit of this important opportunity, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James D. McGaughey". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

James D. McGaughey
Executive Director

JDMc