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# DDS Executive Briefs

## *An Update on CT DDS Initiatives*

November 2019

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### **Message from the Commissioner**

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Dear Friends,

After a busy few months we are pleased to be back with a new Executive Brief and to share all of the exciting initiatives going on within the agency. We continue to look at new and innovative ways to provide supports to the individuals we serve. From housing work to assistive technology, we are working to introduce and bolster models that increase both efficiency and independence. We will highlight some of this work in articles throughout this issue of the Executive Briefs.

To lead off, I hope everyone has had an opportunity to browse through our new [Assistive Technology webpage](#) and [Assistive Technology newsletters](#). If not, I highly recommend checking it out! DDS is committed to ensuring access to technology and information to improve the independence, productivity, and quality of life for individuals with intellectual disability. Technology is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity that everyone deserves a right to access. As technology continues to evolve, it becomes increasingly important to educate the individuals we serve about how advancements can be used in their everyday lives.

To this end, DDS is also in the process of amending our three Medicaid Waivers to promote independence by expanding access to assistive technology. After the Appropriations and Human Services Committees within the Connecticut General Assembly unanimously voted our recommendations through, the amendments are now with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for final approval. We are thankful for the legislature's support as we continue to explore ways to improve the department's continuum of supports.

Shifting gears a bit, much of my time over the past few months has been focused on my second round of statewide family and DDS staff forums. I always enjoy meeting with families and staff in an informal setting to chat. I learn more from these meetings than any other interaction I have as Commissioner. The discussions are not always easy, but they are an opportunity for open and honest dialogue; just the type of discussion DDS must continue to have with families and staff in order to move forward, together, toward what is best for the individuals we serve.

Throughout the most recent round of meetings with families, I noticed a few major themes of discussion. Most notably, several families had questions and concerns regarding the future of employment and day services. These questions were in line with the work the department has prioritized in recent years. DDS continues to take a long, hard look at the future of employment and day services. Throughout October and November, DDS hosted focus groups around the state to hear from families and providers on what is

working, areas for improvement, and creative suggestions for a path forward. We are working to summarize the information gathered at these groups and plan to resurrect the day services steering committee to start implementing next steps.

I look forward to continuing my forums in the new year. Keep an eye on the Latest News section of our [website](#), our [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) pages for dates and times.

As always, I extend my gratitude to all the team members involved in the initiatives I've highlighted here – and to those involved in many other efforts across our agency and system. Thank you for all that you do. Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday season!

With gratitude,

Jordan

## Achievements in Employment

Employment is an integral part of the continuum of services that provides meaningful opportunities for individuals supported by the department. DDS is committed to facilitating integrated employment and offering programs that focus on job-related skill development. Here are two inspiring stories from individuals we serve about their journey with employment:

### **Albert Chumra's Story**



Albert Chumra was hired by the CT Lottery facility in Rocky Hill for a competitive wage and began working in March. CW Resources is providing individualized supported employment services. Albert is doing an excellent job! He is well liked, included in group functions and encouraged to participate by his co-workers.

Albert's immediate supervisor and the woman overseeing his placement continue to report Albert's progress in an upbeat and positive manner. While his initial hiring process stated that he would be cleaning out/repairing the scratch ticket dispensers, Albert has since progressed to several other tasks in their facility. He has even completely cleared their backlog of returned dispensers! In June, Albert assisted his supervisor in giving a presentation on his employment role and a short cost-benefit analysis up to that point. Between March and June, it was reported that Albert's part-time work had saved the CT Lottery thousands of dollars.

In addition to cleaning the dispensers as they come in, Albert has also cleaned out the Keno displays (a rack set up instead of locking boxes), organized binders, and cleaned a forklift. The job coach who sees Albert notes that he is "very organized" - a trait which is greatly appreciated in the Lottery's exceedingly clean and organized warehouse.

Albert's long-term employment goal is to continue working at the Lottery.

*Story contribution from DDS Case Manager, Amy White*

## Christopher Murray's Story

Chris Murray was born on March 23, 1960 and just recently turned 59 years of age. Chris has lived on his own independently for many years at the "Towers" on Fountain Street in New Haven, CT. Chris also has maintained competitive employment at Edge of the Woods Market in New Haven for nearly 40 years with the assistance of natural supports along with his great work ethic and determination. Chris stocks milk, eggs and yogurt in the dairy section and truly enjoys his job and his co-workers.

Chris is also an excellent artist and a natural talent. He enjoys creating paintings and made the Chapel Haven Christmas card from scratch that went out to many members of the community.

For many years of Chris' life, his family was unaware of supports and services that he was eligible for. Chris first received DDS funding and supports in 2018 when he was 58 years of age. Chris has been working competitively at Edge of the Woods Market for over 35 years. Through his employment income Chris is able to pay his rent, groceries and other out of pocket expenses. The continuation of this important part of Chris' life would not have been possible without the team's efforts and energy to prioritize Chris and his overall well-being.

All in all Chris has built a great relationship with all of the members of his new team. He has a great support system with his siblings, staff that have his best interest in mind in all aspects of his life and a DDS Case Manager who will continue to advocate for him and make sure he is receiving the best quality of supports available to him.

Chris recently received the DDS 2019 Living the Mission Award in recognition of all his extraordinary accomplishments. Pictured above is Chris and his family accepting the award presented by Thomas Dailey, DDS Regional Director for the South Region. Congratulations Chris!

*Story Contribution from DDS Case Manager, Chris Mulhall*



## Implementation of Special Act 18-5, Minimum Employee Wages for DDS Providers

In 2018 the Connecticut General Assembly passed Special Act 18-5, *An Act Concerning Minimum Employee Wages for Providers of State-Administered Services for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities*.

This legislation allowed the Office of Policy and Management to fund wage increases for employees of DDS funded private providers. Specifically, the Act provided funding to increase employee wages by five percent or to \$14.75 per hour. In partnership with our qualified providers, DDS has worked to implement the increases by updating the reimbursement rates and the payment system to include the minimum wage funding. DDS is happy to announce that, as of September, provider payments include the minimum wage funding.

DDS is appreciative of the Legislature's commitment and we look forward to continuing to support our qualified provider network for their tireless and extraordinary efforts to serve individuals with intellectual disability.

## **Housing Updates**

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### **Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder Housing (IDASH) Program**

DDS qualified providers support many individuals in integrated, community-based settings with access to transportation, jobs and vocational opportunities. These settings are integral to achieving the department's mission of ensuring individuals fully participate as valued members of their communities.

In partnership with the Department of Housing (DOH), the IDASH program continues to support and grow community-based settings within the state. Specifically, the program funds the development of supportive housing units by requiring property developers to partner with qualified providers to develop proposals for innovative, integrated and affordable housing. The program also focuses on locations that are transit-oriented and close to local work opportunities, while fostering independence by utilizing smart home technology. To-date the Department of Housing (DOH) has awarded two developments, one in Canton and one in Bloomfield.

### **Low Income Housing Tax Credits**

DDS was recently added to the 2019 Connecticut Supportive Housing Guidelines. Published by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA,) the intent of the guidelines is to provide owners and developers seeking tax credit assistance from CHFA or DOH with the information necessary to include supportive housing units in their developments. DDS participation now allows owners to provide affordable, integrated housing options to individuals with intellectual disability without the need for large capital investments from the department.

Developers wishing to receive tax credits for supportive units can partner with a DDS qualified provider and develop a proposed service plan and budget as part of the larger application to be submitted to DOH. The guidelines are administered by the Interagency Council on Supportive Housing and are available here: <https://www.chfa.org/assets/1/6/2019 - Supportive Housing Guideline.pdf>

### **HUD Mainstream Vouchers Rental Assistance**

In the spring of 2018, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued a notice of funding availability for mainstream housing vouchers. These vouchers assist individuals with disabilities with transitioning from licensed congregate care settings to safe and affordable integrated community-based housing. DDS applied for the vouchers and received 18.

HUD recently reissued the notice, and DDS once again joined DOH, the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) in applying for the rental vouchers to benefit individuals with disabilities. It is our hope that we continue to find ways to offset the rental costs associated with people living integrated lives in their communities.

## The Final Rule on Settings

The final Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) regulations set forth new requirements for several Medicaid authorities under which states may provide home and community-based long-term services and supports. States were required to submit a transition plan detailing how services would be brought in line with elements of the final rule. DDS and DSS recently received notice from the Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS) that the CT Settings Rule Statewide Transition Plan (STP) was granted final approval status.

We look forward to ongoing partnership with our provider community on implementing the plan to ensure people receive services in the most integrated settings possible, have choice and control in their lives, participate in their planning process, and are always treated respectfully. CMS has extended the transition period for compliance with the regulation until March 17, 2022.

## Housing Innovation Pilot Program- A Success Story!

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Pursuant to section 2 of Special Act 18-2, DDS recently launched a Housing Innovation Pilot program to establish and evaluate alternative service models in which individuals who are currently receiving residential services may move from their existing residential settings to a more independent, less restrictive residential setting.



DDS is excited to share a recent success story from this program, shared by MidState Arc! Thank you to MidState Arc and all the participating providers for their commitment.

In September 2019, M. moved into his own apartment receiving In-Home Supports in a Cluster (IHS Cluster). A small feat for most, but M. is not like most people. M. has lived his entire adult life in environments with 24/7 staffing. Since 1994, M. has received services from the MidState Arc in Meriden, CT., residing in a Community Living Arrangement with 4 other housemates.

In late 2018, M. was identified as someone who may be able to move into a more independent, less restrictive setting by implementing various pieces of assisted technology and conducting on-going trainings and assessments to decrease the need and presence of support staff. This is part of a Housing Innovation Pilot program conducted by the MidState Arc in partnership with DDS. To initiate this process, an Interdisciplinary Team meeting was held to obtain approvals to begin training to increase independence and for the installation of Assistive Technology equipment in the group home. Technology installed included an electronic Medication Minder to assist with the dispensing of his medications, including sending reminders to M. and alerts to staff, and a Wellness Sensor System to notify staff when there has been a deviation from his normal routine, such as not getting out of bed at his usual time. Cameras were installed in the common areas of the group home and were only activated when an assessment was being run on M.'s reactions to simulated events when in the home alone, such as a smoke detector being set off or a stranger comes to the front door. A Cook Stop was also installed, which automatically shuts the stove/oven off if it does not sense motion in the kitchen after a set amount of time.

A transition to independence plan was developed for M. to focus on time spent alone, medication management, personal care, cooking, safety, money management, transportation, and community connections for grocery shopping, pharmacy, banking, health, and recreation. Over the course of 3 months, multiple assessments were completed to gather information as to how M. responded to situations when alone in the home.

M. completed all assessments in July 2019 and his Interdisciplinary Team met to review progress made toward independence. The team agreed to proceed forward with M. moving out of the group home and into his own apartment in the IHS Cluster when a vacant apartment became available. M. is so happy to be in his own home and continues to make great strides in his independence. Up next is travel training on public transportation.

### Reflecting on Summer 2019 at Camp Harkness

The 2019 summer season at Camp Harkness was a busy and successful one! Throughout June, July and August, Camp Harkness greeted more than 27,000 visitors from over 70 different groups. In addition, numerous public and private agencies utilized the grounds for meetings and hundreds of families used Camp Harkness as their destination to spend quality time together.

Camp Harkness also hosted 8 weeks of residential camp, run by the Arc of Eastern CT, United Cerebral Palsy, Sunrise Northeast, Oak Hill, and Southbury Training School.



All cabins, tent sites and picnic pavilions were reserved and full throughout the season with many reservations, special events and fundraisers planned through the fall and winter months. The community joined Camp Harkness for Days of Caring pre-camp and for special events such as the British Car Show (in conjunction with Harkness Memorial Park), Summerfest, the Governor's Horse Guard, and weekly yoga classes.

DDS wants to thank all of the dedicated visitors, volunteers and staff that helped make the 2019 season at Camp Harkness a success! Everyone's commitment allows the camp to bring summer joy to so many!

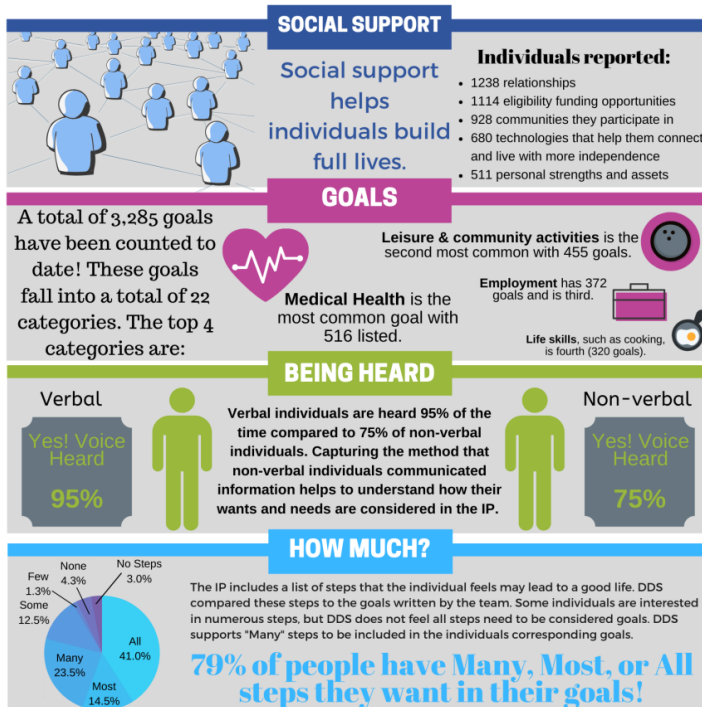
## Reviewing the DDS Individual Plan- A Year of Data

In July of 2018, DDS began utilizing a new format for the Individual Plan (IP). Relatively unchanged since 2006, the goal of the new format was to allow individuals to have a stronger voice in the planning process. As DDS began to implement such changes, we also started collecting information reported in IPs and

### THE DDS INDIVIDUAL PLAN A YEAR OF DATA

The individual plan (IP) has been a part of the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) since it was established. While the name has changed over time, the intent has always been to allow individuals to have a voice in the supports they receive.

Recent changes to the plan allow individuals' preferences to be addressed first, with the initial step in planning to review the individual's goals, likes, and dislikes. These changes have allowed DDS to capture information on the social supports available to individuals, what individuals are working towards, and if individuals are being heard. Below is a review of 400 IPs from July of 2018 to June of 2019.



IPs were sent to the Business Intelligence and Analytics Unit Research Analyst from Case Managers and Case Manager Supervisors. IPs were reviewed and coded according to a scoring method developed by the Unit and informed by Case Managers. Cross training on the scoring method was completed and multiple trained staff coded the same IPs to evaluate inter-rater reliability. There was 94.45% overlap in coding which exceeds empirically supported standards.

#### BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYTICS UNIT

common goal category followed by leisure & community, employment, and life skills.

For the section on being heard, we assessed how communication can impact this variable. In fact, 95% of verbal individuals and 75% of non-verbal individuals believed they were being heard. Information in the IP about how an individual communicates wants and needs was vital to this section.

Finally, the IP includes a list of steps that an individual feels may lead to a good life. One can see on the graphic how many of the steps to a good life are actually reported in the IP goals. 79% of IPs reviewed had at least 50% of their steps to a good life in their goals.

Thank you to the Business Intelligence & Analytics Unit at DDS for their efforts on this project. DDS is excited to expand our use of data to measure outcomes and help tell the important stories of the individuals we serve.

measuring whether the IP captures if the individual's voice was heard.

With the help of DDS case manager supervisors and case managers, DDS began collecting, documenting and reviewing the common goals identified in IPs and tracking action steps. From there, DDS was able to identify social supports available to individuals, steps individuals are working toward to achieve their goals and if the IP captures if the individual's voice was heard.

The infographic to the left titled "The Individual Plan, A Year of Data" provides a snapshot of the outcomes collected. Let's dive into the outcomes a bit deeper!

On the infographic we can see social support listed. Individuals served by DDS identified 1238 relationship categories, and therefore reported relationships as being their strongest social support.

The top five goal categories are listed next. Medical health was the most