

A note from Commissioner Jordan A. Scheff

You may have heard recently about the ARPA 'Moving On' initiative. Moving On is part of a once-in-a-generation opportunity for DDS, providers, partners, and our workforce to make improvements throughout our system. These improvements will allow us to transform our system so that individuals we support can, where appropriate, live more independently and become fuller participants in their communities.

We have been working on the Moving On initiative since last summer with individuals, families, providers, experts, and DDS staff. We have been seeking stakeholder input to move this plan forward in a thoughtful, careful way. We are making good progress with our plan to improve opportunities for the individuals we serve by creating new pathways to supported independence.

I am excited to announce that in the months ahead, the work done on the ARPA Moving On initiative will be transitioning into a new phase. While ARPA Moving On has been the catalyst for change, what we have been designing is the long-term plan for supports and services, even after the ARPA period has ended. We are now integrating the work done through the ARPA Moving On initiative into the fabric of our system. The long-term result of this work will be called STEP. The key elements of STEP are intended to outlast the federal ARPA funding initiative and become the bedrock of the DDS system.

STEP stands for **S**upporting Transformation to **E**mpower **P**eople. We think this name reflects DDS' mission, values, and goals. STEP offers supports, services, and technologies so that individuals can have more choices in their life, their work and live more independently. While still having the supports they need, the program will help individuals to live, learn, and work with greater freedom.

This newsletter is the first update on our progress and goals. Over the next year, you will be hearing a lot about STEP. Our goal is to send newsletter updates every other month and provide other updates on our website, with emails, and at forums and other info sessions. In the future, we want to move to a more sustainable electronic newsletter. Please help us by visiting portal.ct.gov/dds and clicking on the "Subscribe for E- Updates" link.

STEP WILL:

- Promote greater independence and freedom of choice for all individuals.
- Provide creative and innovative technologies and supports to all individuals.
- Support individuals to live in more inclusive, community-based environments.
- Provide safeguards, allowing individuals to return to previous levels of support if needed.

STEP WILL NOT:

- Close all group homes and congregate settings.
- Eliminate supports necessary to meet individual needs.
- Require people to change or stop supports, unless agreed to in their individual plan.



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Individuals & Families

We began this work by listening first to those directly affected by this initiative: the individuals and families we support. And we will continue to listen to individuals and families throughout this process.

Our primary goal is to ensure the health and safety of the individuals we support, while finding ways to support them in environments that are less restrictive than traditional congregate care settings. Our person-centered team will support individuals transitioning into the least restrictive, most independent, supportive, realistic and safe situation possible in their communities.

The results of a survey sent to individuals and families with loved ones in both our residential and day programs will be a key point of guidance for STEP moving forward. We plan to publish a summary of those results on the DDS website...stay tuned!

STEP GOALS:

- We are working to develop programs that emphasize education, employment, individualized residential and day supports, skill building, engagement, and inclusion.
- Our goal is to improve supports with the assistance of technologies to transition individuals from congregate residential or day settings into more independent home and/or community-based settings that offer the opportunity to become more active and integrated members of the community.

Support

We know that talk of this change can be unsettling for some families. We want to stress the importance we place on continuing to offer any supports necessary to help individuals challenge themselves, succeed, and grow to their full potential. DDS and your providers will be with you every STEP of the way.

We will make expanded use of assistive technology and remote supports to empower individuals while supplementing staff assistance for those people STEP'ing into more independence.

We recognize that sometimes, individuals may need to take a STEP back: There will always be a safety net available in case the individual transformation situation does not work out as planned.

DDS Staff and Private Providers

As challenging as this change may be for individuals and families, it also requires the coordination and collaboration of both DDS staff and private provider partners. We are doing our best to maintain strong communications and teamwork moving forward.

Our communication is not one-way. Just as we sought feedback from individuals and families, we are in continuous conversation with our front-line service providers to ensure we meet our mutual goal of improving the quality of life for every individual we support. This includes new funding opportunities for providers where needed.

The goal of STEP is to provide increased opportunity for all our provider partners, DDS staff, and community stakeholders to find and support the best fit for each individual we serve so that they can live as independently, safely, and securely as possible.

Next STEPs

Five committees are working to finalize details and begin implementation of STEP. The committees give each stakeholder group (providers, individuals, families, DDS staff) a voice in the process, which will help lead to STEP's success.

Our main goal is to "join with others to create and promote meaningful opportunities for individuals to fully participate as valued members of their communities." We aim to do this safely and with the level of supports identified in each individual's person-centered plan. And, we aim to do this in a manner that strengthens the long-time partnerships we have with our provider partners.



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