

Testimony on DDS 2022-27 Draft Strategic Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department of Developmental Services 2022-27 Draft Strategic Plan. My name is Carol Scully and I'm the Director of Advocacy for The Arc of Connecticut. I'm testifying on behalf of The Arc and Win Everts, the Executive Director of The Arc of Connecticut. My comments will be from the perspective of The Arc Connecticut.

First, we want to acknowledge the extraordinarily difficult operating environment over the last almost two years due to COVID-19 and are grateful for the heroic efforts of DDS and other system stakeholders during this time. The pandemic has highlighted cracks and fissures in our support system and mitigating those has, in some cases, brought stakeholders closer together.

We are generally supportive of the plan as it's laid out. However, we are a little bewildered that the plan does not include some information that is generally found in a strategic plan. Components like:

- Clear identification of specific agency goals and objectives to be achieved over the next 5 years.
- Definition of the priority areas in the short term (year one and two) and the long-term priorities to be accomplished by the end of year 5.
- Development of clearly defined metrics to measure progress in the improvement for the aspects of the current system that were identified as needing improvement.

While we are pleased to see goals related to independent living and meaningful community engagement and employment, we are interested in learning more about the specific initiatives the agency will pursue to accomplish them. Additionally, the plan did not:

- Identify the initiatives that will be operationalized to address a broadening spectrum of need in the IDD Community over the next five years.
- Provide the goals and metrics to be used to define success for each initiative.
- Define how any time-limited, allocated American Rescue Plan Act funds will be applied to current or future programs and how those actions align to 5-year plan goals and outcomes.

DDS currently has a moratorium on the development of community-based 24-hour residential settings with the exception of individuals transitioning from Southbury Training School to the community. Because these settings use over 80% of the state's community-based residential funds, this moratorium is of particular concern to aging parents. The Arc Connecticut suggests (three) actions to alleviate this roadblock to independent living.

1. Create a Supported Living service structure that mimics practices in other states to expand opportunities to be supported in unlicensed, individualized settings.
2. Re-draft the Shared Living support materials to be an operational manual so that both families and affordable housing can be part of the solution.
3. Develop a person-centered Quality of Life measurement tool that is agnostic to the type of setting and includes the voice of the individual being supported and the family/guardian's voice in its construction and implementation.

Many families struggle to find programming that meets the needs of their loved ones for many reasons. Implementing some of the following enhancements might help individuals and families make less stressful decisions and improve provider performance.

1. Increase training resources for both families and direct support professionals in areas that match the needs of the individuals seeking support.
2. Increase the number of med certified provider staff and lower the time period from successfully completing certification to receiving proof of the certification.
3. Increase access to medical and behavioral emergency supports in Employment and Day programs.
4. Include an assistive technology assessment in the initial assessment and include a discussion about it during each IP meeting.

To develop momentum in employment for people with IDD, a collaborative culture must be developed between the individuals being supported, providers, families, and DDS. This might include:

- educational sessions about person-centered planning, proven employment progression programs, and other resources for individuals and families;
- integrating progress measurement data into periodic reports that might inform plan alterations;
- aligning provider payments with sustained outcomes, and
- utilizing information from Connecticut's workforce development efforts and Department of Labor resources.

This effort would be greatly aided by a formal collaboration among Aging and Disability Services, State Department of Education, and DDS to design and implement a statewide, person-centered planning and support development process identifying employment/community participation as a primary objective for those students with IEP's at the age of 14.

"The mission of DDS is to partner with the individuals we support and their families, to support lifelong planning and to join with others to create and promote meaningful opportunities for individuals to fully participate as valued members of their communities."

Families want that partnership but the communications and actions around situations that are not 100% aligned with service definitions sometimes seem arbitrary or misunderstood. Families/guardians are an important stakeholder group....

In conclusion, The Arc Connecticut is advocating for DDS to support people with IDD and their families with supports that meet the individual where they are in their community so they may have the fullest life possible without barriers that inhibit choice, participation, or quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this process.

Carol Scully, Director of Advocacy
The Arc of Connecticut, Inc.
cscully@thearcct.org