NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

Memorandum

April 8, 2025

Dear Esteemed DDAC Employment and Meaningful Activities Committee,

OPWDD accepts the recommendations from the DDAC Employment and Meaningful Activities Committee as we continue ongoing efforts to remove barriers and adopt best practices, procedures, or policies to improve quality services and capacity. We are excited to implement Executive Order 40 signed by Governor Hochul on September 30, 2024, and advance the objectives outlined in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan to increase the number of people engaged in competitive integrated employment and meaningful community activities.

OPWDD reviewed each of your recommendations and is responding as follows:

1. Understanding that everyone will have a different path to employment, OPWDD should develop a comprehensive graphic or road map that would lay out the options for moving from school, day hab, community hab to pre-employment and supported employment. This document, developed in cooperation with ACCES-VR, should be on the website, as well as made available to care managers, families, and day hab staff.

To date the following related activities have occurred.

- OPWDD recently updated the OPWDD website to clearly depict the employment services designed to create a career plan and get training to work and the day services designed to increase independence and community involvement. Available services are explained in plain language and summarized in the recently updated and released *Getting a Job and Participating In Your Community* and *Transition Planning: From School to Adult Life* flyers, also publicly available on the OPWDD website.

- People, their families, advocates and planning teams can learn more about the agencies and service options available to navigate the path to employment by viewing the employment services Front Door video module available on the OPWDD website. This brief video provides information concerning both OPWDD and ACCES-VR. Viewers are encouraged to work with their care manager to explore each agency and their respective service options.

- OPWDD and its training partner Eleversity offer an *Innovations in Employment Supports* training specifically designed for care managers that addresses employment and vocational services. This training is offered virtually each quarter. We increased access to this training in 2024 in response to demand.

- OPWDD has allocated funding to its training partner, Eleversity to develop and implement a new training for direct support professionals delivering day habilitation services. This training will ensure that staff are able to better assist people to transition to other services to meet their goals. The curriculum will emphasize increasing community engagement and job-related skills, as well as how OPWDD's flexible and responsive service options can help move people toward employment.

OPWDD has reviewed this request and will develop a graphic or road map that would lay out the options for moving from school, day, community and vocational services to supported employment. OPWDD will work collaboratively with family and self-advocacy to design the graphic and road map. OPWDD will also collect input from the Counsel on Development Disabilities (CDD) who recently issued a guide for self-advocates and families on the employment services process and resources. The CDD Employment Resource Guide is located at https://cdd.ny.gov/employment-initiatives. OPWDD will review the draft graphic/road map with its state partners, ACCES-VR and NYS Commission for the Blind to include presentation. OPWDD will complete the recommended graphic/road with stakeholder input within one year from the date the DDAC formally adopts this recommendation.

2. Every individual's Life Plan should include an opportunity to consider a plan for employment, entrepreneurship, and other meaningful life activities. The person-centered planning process should include questions that will help to develop the transition plan to be person centered, asking about special interests and skills, and leading to employment, entrepreneurship, and other meaningful activities.

This is a timely recommendation as the Governor had signed the Employment First, Executive Order 40 and appropriated funding for Employment First and OPWDD's State of the State employment initiatives. The Employment First adopted principles state that employment will be considered as the first option and the preferred outcome when planning and delivering services for people with disabilities across New York State. State agencies will designate an Employment First Liaison to coordinate with the Employment First activities and to submit an implementation plan for adopting the principles to the Chief Disability Officer by October 1, 2025.

The Employment First Liaison will also coordinate the development of OPWDD guidance documents with greater detail for next steps and responsibilities will be issued. Next steps include but are not limited to:

- Reviewing current OPWDD policies and practices to improve services.
- Trainings in Employment First principles for state and voluntary agencies and Care Managers. As part of the Employment First goal plan due October 2025, OPWDD

will propose changes to add a section in the Life Plan specifically related to each person's career goals or "My Career." Care Managers will be trained on a series of questions to ask when planning services with each person to identify the person's interest in employment, experiences to date, work skills developed, personal interests, transportation options, benefits planning, etc. OPWDD will also train Care Managers to transition people to employment through the available array of services, as needed and desired. A summary of the person's career goals and activities will be documented and periodically updated in the new Life Plan section.

In response to recommendation #2, OPWDD will request feedback from DDAC, self-advocates, and families on the series of questions that Care Managers will ask to complete the new Life Plan section. Training will be provided for families and self-advocates related to the new Life Plan section and corresponding planning questions/guides. It is anticipated that these activities will occur within 2 years from the date the DDAC formally adopts this recommendation.