



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

February 22, 2021

Dear Stakeholders, Colleagues and Partners:

It has been about six months since I was appointed as the Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS). With all that is happening in our world, it feels like this occurred just last week and at the same time years ago.

Over these past six months, DDDS has continued to focus tremendous time and effort on our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, we have worked with our Community Providers to ensure safe environments and conditions for our service recipients and those who support them, kept families and loved ones connected, and laid the groundwork to reopen and resume programming across the state. We have worked with the Department (DHSS) to implement the DHSS CARES Act Healthcare Relief Fund and authorized approximately \$9.9M in CARES Act funding for DDDS Community Providers. Providers used these funds to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning/sanitation supplies, technology equipment, and to help preserve our employment and day services provider network.

We have worked with the Division of Public Health (DPH) and our Community Providers to make Point of Care Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) available for more than 2,500 Direct Support Professionals who work in residential settings, employment sites, and day service settings across the state. This testing option allows providers the ease of testing their staff in a setting of their choosing: a group home, a day program, an office, or wherever is most convenient for them and offers results in just 15 minutes. Our Division is also working together with DPH, the Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Disabilities (DSAAPD), the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI), the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH), the Division of State Service Centers (DSSC) and the Division of Health Care Quality (DHCQ) on vaccine distribution logistics to ensure that the individuals we serve, and those who support them, can have safe, equitable access to this resource.

While we are encouraged by these positive activities, our excitement is tempered by the explosion of new Coronavirus cases across our service system over the last 60 days. After the initial peak in early spring, cases leveled off significantly through the summer and early fall. In November,

however, we once again saw cases of COVID-19 begin to spike. Prior to this second wave of infections, we had a cumulative total of 77 service recipients in provider-managed residential settings who had tested positive for COVID-19; as Friday, February 5, 2021, the number of those who have tested positive has ballooned to 263. This is an increase of 241%. Unfortunately, we have seen a similar increase in the number of DSPs who have tested positive, with the case totals rising by 235% (103 to 346). Sadly, we have seen 17 service recipients die as a result of contracting this virus: 8 of those deaths have occurred over the last 2 months. Fortunately, we have begun to see a leveling-off of these new cases; this is very welcomed news. We also know that the State of Delaware has begun receiving shipments of the vaccine and that more than 150,000 healthcare workers (including Direct Support Professionals), long-term care residents/staff, first responders and individuals aged 65 or older have already received their first vaccination. With effective rates in the 90th percentiles, the vaccine is expected to be our most effective tool yet in containing this Coronavirus.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated much of our time and effort, it has not been our sole focus within DDDS. In my August correspondence, I identified three areas of focus for the coming year:

- 1) Optimize Operations
- 2) Improve Communication
- 3) Expand Opportunities

Below, I offer a glimpse at the progress made in each of these areas to date. The work highlighted here is a reflection of the commitment of our amazing staff at DDDS working in a challenging environment to ensure that the individuals we serve all across the State of Delaware continue to have access to the supports they need to live their best lives.

Our work here is not done, and we cannot do it alone. I'm excited to share this update so that we can continue to work together to build the future of services and service delivery for the individuals we support. As always, I welcome your ongoing engagement. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly with questions, concerns, ideas, and interest at:

[DHSS DDDS Suggestions@delaware.gov](mailto:DHSS_DDDS_Suggestions@delaware.gov).

Respectfully yours,



Marissa Catalon

Division Director

1) Optimize Operations

- **Fully implement the new person-centered planning process using the Charting the LifeCourse framework and the LifeCourse tools.** Progress since August:
 - Conducted a three-part virtual summit series for 100 supervisors and mid-level management staff (Providers & DDDS) to introduce these frontline leaders to the LifeCourse framework and the LifeCourse tools. (These events were postponed from March 2020 due to the Public Health Emergency.)
 - Conducted Delaware-specific workshops for Summit participants to demonstrate how Delaware will implement the LifeCourse framework and LifeCourse tools for person-centered planning.
 - Led strategic planning sessions with Residential Habilitation & Employment/Day Service Providers using the LifeCourse Trajectory tool.
 - Surveyed our Providers to help inform DDDS on how best to proceed in next steps of roll out.
- **Fully implement and continuously improve the Targeted Case Management Services introduced in 2017.** Progress since August:
 - DDDS and Columbus have worked diligently to fully implement quality Targeted Case Management services through enhanced communications, performance measurement, and ensuring appropriate staffing. Examples include:
 - Increasing the frequency of contact with service recipients to ensure that they know who to reach out to with any issues or concerns they may have during the PHE. Columbus Community Navigators assure the distribution of the DDDS Director of Community Services' *Letter to Families*. Columbus' Executive Director for Delaware has participated in several Family Town Hall meetings to both share and receive information from service recipients and their families.
 - Performance Measurements established for Targeted Case Management services have reached all-time highs with scores in the mid-to-high 90s for the last three (3) quarterly audits. As a Medicaid service, compliance is achieved at 86%. Columbus is performing well above the minimum compliance levels for the Targeted Case Management Services.
 - Columbus has added a second Quality Enhancement position to respond to the ongoing growth in the number of service recipients they support. This position will support current compliance activities but also continuous quality improvement activities.
- **Seek creative solutions to recruit and retain DDDS staff for the "hard-to-fill" positions such as Nurses, Certified Nursing Assistants and Therapists.** Progress since August:
 - Worked with the Nurses Union to offer compressed schedules for nursing staff
 - Recruited part-time LPNs to supplement RN staffing
- **Maximize the use of Federal funds.** Progress since August:
 - Filed three quarters of Medicaid administrative claims; these claims allow DDDS to receive funds from CMS (Center for Medicaid Services) to share in the cost of administering our Medicaid programs. The total for these claims is more than \$2.2 million dollars.
 - Applied for Federal CARES Act funding to support Stockley Center with unexpected expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The total award was \$185,000.

- Worked with the Division of Management Services (DMS) to leverage additional CARES Act funding of \$65,000 to purchase and install air purification systems for Stockley Center.
- Worked collaboratively with the Columbus Organization to support 119 service recipients to enroll in the Lifespan Waiver so a portion of the cost of their services can be matched with Federal Medicaid funds. In all, 65 of the 119 service recipients have already begun receiving services at a total annual cost of approximately \$780,000. Because each of these service recipients are enrolled in the Lifespan Waiver, 66% of the total annual cost is shared by the Federal Medicaid program. This equates to more than \$500,000 annually. This direct savings to the State enables the Division to support other individuals and families and to continue to build a robust and diverse portfolio of services for the individuals we serve.
- **Implement new features in our electronic case record systems and transition to a fully integrated comprehensive case record.** Progress since August:
 - Identified and implemented more efficient usage of features in the new electronic medical record in use at Stockley Center.
 - Worked with Therap to roll out the Unified Individual Data Form which ensures continuity of core data across all providers serving the same service recipient.
 - Activated the Charting the LifeCourse Tools in Therap so that the tools are fully accessible electronically versus in paper format.
 - Worked with Therap to embed the federally mandated Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) feature into our electronic case record. This feature went live on 1/1/2021 in compliance with the federal mandate.

2) Improve Communications

- **Create a user-friendly website that guides individual users easily and efficiently to the information they need.** Progress since August:
 - Launched an updated homepage for the DDDS website with the following goals: 1) improve access to key resources and documents; 2) anticipate the needs of stakeholder groups and reorganize information to improve access; and 3) simplify the overall design to make it easier to navigate and more accessible to individuals using assistive technologies for web browsing.
 - Updated the “Apply for Services” webpage including a streamlined application to determine eligibility and added new sections such as “what to expect” and “next steps” so applicants can more easily apply for services and understand how the process flows.
- **Expand the reach of our digital engagement to provide additional opportunities for virtual learning, information sharing, and community.** Progress since August:
 - Transitioned training opportunities for Stockley Center and Community Services from in-person to online using the newly acquired online training platform, Relias.
 - Expanded digital family engagement opportunities to include:
 - A co-hosted series on maintaining financial wellness
 - Hosted a webinar on deaf culture
 - Hosted a family-led townhall
 - Expanded presence on social media channels for communications on COVID-19 related topics, as well as community and news sharing opportunities.

- ***Develop sustainable and regular methods of communicating timely information to our internal staff and partners and external stakeholders.*** Progress since August:
 - Communications with Providers:
 - Conducted two meetings per week with the Network of Community Providers to facilitate rapid Coronavirus response and information sharing across the network.
 - Published 29 Coronavirus Provider Guidance documents.
 - Conducted monthly Provider Advisory Committees with Residential Habilitation Providers and Employment/Day Service Providers in addition to the two weekly virtual meetings.
 - Conducted quarterly Provider Best Practice meetings with the Nurse Consultation Providers and Behavioral Consultation Providers.
 - Conducted introductory meetings between the new Director of Service Integrity and Enhancement (SIE) and each of the 45 Home and Community-Based Service Provider local leaders. Provider feedback from these meetings is being used to continue process improvements between SIE and the Providers.
 - Collaborated with a Provider workgroup to finalize and publish new formal procedures to outline step-by-step guides for opening and closing a provider-managed residential site.
 - Implemented a quarterly Shared Living Provider Newsletter to improve communication with our Shared Living Providers.
 - Implemented a monthly contact between the DDDS Shared Living Coordinators and Shared Living Providers to provide support and enhanced communication.
 - Communications with Families:
 - Published six letters with updates about the Coronavirus to families with a loved one who is served by DDDS in a community-based setting using a variety of communication methods: emailed from a case management entity, shared via general DDDS Facebook page, posted to the DDDS Website, and in some cases read in its entirety via a telephone call from a case management entity.
 - Conducted the third DDDS Family Virtual Town Hall in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) and the DDDS Family Advisory Council (DDDSAC).
 - Published weekly letters to families with a loved one who lives at Stockley Center.
 - Developed a private Facebook page for families with a loved one who lives at Stockley Center.
 - Utilized the general DDDS Facebook page to share local information & events and national news stories.
 - Communications within and across DDDS:
 - Conducted a first ever climate survey for all DDDS staff to inform organizational, operational, and strategic planning
 - Implemented a quality improvement and assurance strategy to assure the success rate for Shared Living Provider billing.

- Implemented quarterly townhall meetings for DDDS employees.
 - Issued four Coronavirus Guidance documents for DDDS employees.
- ***Design and implement a public outreach and media campaign to increase the visibility of our service recipient population and the impact of our work.*** Progress since August:
 - Collaborated with the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) to develop a plan for a film project tentatively titled “See Me.”
 - Worked with Delaware Academy of Medicine to develop first-person narratives for a future special issue of the Delaware Journal of Public Health focusing on individuals with developmental disabilities in Delaware.

3) Expand Opportunities

- ***Work with our partners at the Department of Education (DOE), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance (DMMA), and the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) to strengthen how we work together to support youth with IDD as they transition from school services into adulthood.*** Progress since August:
 - In partnership with the DOE, DVR, DVI and LEAs, expanded the PIPELine Project to include three new schools. PIPELine is a project led by the DOE to increase the number of students with disabilities who participate in career and technical education programs while in high school.
 - Coordinated with DVR and the Parent Information Center (PIC) to conduct training for staff to develop a better understanding of the work each agency performs and to facilitate stronger collaborations.
 - Coordinated with DVR to arrange “meet and greets” for new staff as a part of their orientation process. These events introduce the new staff to colleagues with whom they will be working closely in support of youth transitioning from school to adulthood.
- ***Examine best practice and explore innovative approaches to support people with unique or more complex support needs.*** Progress since August:
 - Initiated conversations with Christiana Care’s Center for Special Health Care Needs to establish a working partnership on planning for and supporting individuals with complex and multiple care needs.
 - Collaborated with an existing Residential Habilitation Provider to develop a specialized community residential option for deaf individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities.
 - Established new contracts with two new Residential Habilitation Providers (one in Vermont the other in New Jersey) to support three individuals with intensive behavior support needs.
 - Met with two Providers with operations in other states that provide residential supports for individuals with complex support needs to encourage extending those services into Delaware.