



**DELAWARE HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

DIVISION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

August 10, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

It is an honor and my distinct privilege to be appointed as the Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS). These are challenging times for all of us working to protect those we love and serve from the COVID-19 pandemic. Navigating these unprecedented events has only highlighted the essential nature of our work. I am confident that we will grow as a division, as a community, and as a state through this, and I am humbled to have this opportunity to lead this amazing group during this time.

Having worked with Marie Nonnenmacher for the last eight years, including the past two years as her deputy, I know there are very few people who could compare to the level of knowledge and experience that Marie brought to us as the Division Director. I have endeavored to learn as much as I could from Marie to add to my own 27 years of experience with the State of Delaware the last 15 of which have been here with DDDS.

I am committed to ensuring that DDDS helps people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) to live their best lives. We do this best by gaining an understanding of what each person we serve wants in his/her life and by partnering and collaborating with others to make that a reality.

These are collaborative efforts, and DDDS will need to do two things to play its role as the facilitator of these collaborations.

First, DDDS needs to fully implement the new person-centered planning process using the Charting the LifeCourse framework and the LifeCourse tools. The LifeCourse approach, developed by people with IDD and their families in conjunction with the Institute for Human Development at the University of Missouri - Kansas City, provides the foundation for constructing a service model that continually places our service recipient at the center of our work.

Second, DDDS can't do this work alone, which is why we must also continue to strengthen our relationships with the individuals we serve and the broader network of people and organizations that make these services possible: families and caregivers, service providers, professional advocacy organizations, legislators, other state and local agencies, schools and the broader community. Each person we serve is unique; each has their own individual needs, ambitions, and desires. If we are to support each of them in reaching for their own best life, it is essential that we continue to develop and maintain a diverse and robust network of services and supports and work to continuously improve the function and efficiency of our operations in delivering those services.

We have made so much progress in recent years. It is critical that we continue that momentum as we strive for the future. As such, my immediate priorities are to:

1) Optimize Operations

- Fully implement and continuously improve the Targeted Case Management Services introduced in 2017. Whether the service recipient is supported by a Columbus Community Navigator, a DDDS Support Coordinator, a DDDS Resource Coordinator or a DDDS Employment Navigator, the service recipient should have confidence that he/she has a reliable and knowledgeable resource to assist him/her when needed.
- Seek creative solutions to recruit and retain DDDS staff for the “hard-to-fill” positions such as Nurses, Certified Nursing Assistants and Therapists.
- Maximize the use of Federal funds. This effort, starting in January 2018, has resulted in approximately \$3 million in additional federal matching funds. These additional funds have helped offset the unexpected costs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Implement new features in our electronic case record system and transition to a fully integrated comprehensive case record.

2) Improve Communications

- Create a user-friendly website that guides individual users easily and efficiently to the information they need.
- Expand the reach of our digital engagement to provide additional opportunities for virtual learning, information sharing, and community.
- Develop sustainable and regular methods of communicating timely information to our internal staff and partners and external stakeholders.
- Design and implement a public outreach and media campaign to increase the visibility of our service recipient population and the impact of our work.

3) Expand Opportunities

- Expand employment services and supports by broadening the eligibility criteria of the Pathways to Employment program enabling more people access to those enhanced employment services and by working with our network of community providers to increase provider capacity to serve more people who have unique or more challenging supports to achieve paid employment.
- Work with our partners at the Department of Education, Local Education Agencies, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Medicaid and Medical Assistance, and the Division for the Visually Impaired to strengthen how we work together to support youth with IDD as they transition from school services into adulthood.
- Examine best practice and explore innovative approaches to support people with unique or more complex support needs.
- Assess and re-evaluate our ongoing system response to the COVID-19 pandemic in collaboration with our many stakeholders.

While DDDS is actively engaged in several major projects, we also have other important initiatives on our radar. While I would very much like to tackle everything right away, it is critical that we prioritize and sequence projects in a manner that will not overwhelm the service system and the DDDS workforce. I believe we have a service system full of passionate, competent and committed people who share a

vision of a fully inclusive and responsive community in which all people can reach for and obtain their best life. As individuals and as a community, we see endless opportunities for improvement. We need to harness that ambition and that creativity in productive and focused ways, otherwise we set ourselves up for failure – trying to deliver on every idea without planning, prioritizing, and devoting the resources needed to complete the task. Knowing our priorities will help us to direct resources where they are most immediately needed; establish clarity within our division and its efforts to deliver on its mission; and enhance our relationships with our partners and stakeholders who can be folded into our work.

As we bring some of our current projects to a close, we will have the opportunity to begin exploring new priorities, such as:

1. Workforce Development: DDDS and Community Providers are both painfully aware of the workforce crisis impacting the health and social service sectors. This is a national struggle attributed to the growing number of people (elderly and with disabilities) who need health and social services to enable them to live in their community. It is coming at a time when baby boomers are leaving the workforce and there are fewer new workers to fill both existing and new positions. While I do not believe we will develop the miracle cure, we can identify potential strategies that may help us to reduce the strain.
2. Technology: New technologies that enable and support individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities are emerging in new and exciting ways. Integrating these technologies into our service system could be a game changer for our service ecosystem. New communication technologies could greatly improve how people express themselves and become empowered as self-advocates for the life they wish to live. Technologies focused on mobility and transportation could help foster greater independence and less reliance on professional staff. While there will always be a need for a physical person to provide supports, technology could help expand the reach of staff by using remote support options.
3. Data: DDDS has always had a wealth of information at its fingertips, but it hasn't always had the tools available to make the most of it. Thanks to breakthroughs in managing and accessing that data, we are finally in a position to use that data to help inform our operations and planning to drive policies that can improve and enhance the lives of individuals with I/DD all across Delaware. Learning to access and harness this data will be critical for us in the near term.

These are just three examples of additional areas of need, there are many more. If you have additional ideas, I encourage you to share those thoughts with me and the DDDS Leadership team. Please consider offering comments via DHSS_DDDS_Suggestions@delaware.gov. While I cannot promise we will be able to immediately start to address every issue, I can commit to learning more and monitoring these areas of concern.

Sincerely,


Marissa Catalan