People First Waiver and OPWDD Five-Year Plan

Marie Awn Floyd
Director of Family Support Services

Significant changes are underway that will affect everyone who receives services and supports that are funded by the Office For People with Developmental Disabilities in New York State.

Services and supports for people with developmental disabilities are at a critical juncture as continuation of the current funding structure used in New York State is no longer sustainable. NYS OPWDD has been in the process of developing a five-year plan starting in 2012 and has merged this planning process with a redesign of its system of care for its citizens with developmental disabilities. OPWDD is in the process of applying to the federal Center For Medicaid Services to develop new models to fund its services through the use of the 1115 Research and Demonstration Waiver. The 1115 Waiver, as it is commonly known, allows states to use Medicaid dollars in ways that aren’t usually allowed and has been used by other states to transform services and health care systems.

OPWDD refers to this newly designed system of care as the “People First Waiver”. It is based on a managed care model where care coordination organizations will assist individuals to access supports and services that are based on an assessment of an individual’s ability level, strengths and preferences. The assessment will determine a level of funding that an individual has allocated to them to pay for their supports and services. It is anticipated that individuals and their families will have the choice from a minimum of at least two care...

continued on p. 2

One Person at a Time

Danielle Mazza
Director of Medicaid Service Coordination

The agency Change Team has been meeting for close to a year and although the idea of enhancing person-centered approaches is challenging we continue to embrace and commit to it. As we enter this new era of services and supports we are looking for ways to increase our individualized focus to meet the needs of the people we serve and to be ready for the realities that await us in regards to state and federal funding.

On October 18th we invited Derrick Dufresne, a nationally recognized expert on the topic of person-centered approaches, to help inspire all of the Wildwood community to focus on this theme. Derrick spoke on topics such as “The Difference Between Having a Program and Having a Life,” “Keeping the Person in Person Centered Planning,” and “Changing the System One Person at a Time.” He challenged the staff to listen to those we serve as they tell us...

continued on p. 4
Dear Friends...

Change is in the air. As you read about the OPWDD Five Year Plan and the new 1115 People First Waiver, it is apparent that the landscape will evolve over the next several years and the system of supports as we know them, will change. The Five Year Plan and Waiver provide a framework for this, however exactly how it’s going to look remains largely unknown.

While the unknown certainly creates some anxiety, as it is hard to think about a system of “what if’s”, it also creates a great deal of opportunity. Woven into the language of the Five Year Plan and the People First Waiver is a focus on person-centered, self-determined, and individualized supports. Pilot programs referred to as Demonstration Projects will test the waters of these supports to see what will work and what may not be as successful.

Wildwood Programs embraces the individualized focus built into the new system of care. Even prior to hearing about OPWDD’s Five Year Plan or framework of the new Waiver, we were beginning work on our own change. A “Change Team” was formed, which incorporates staff from all facets of the agency, who are interested in working to further person-centered and truly individualized options for those we support. Focus is also placed on creating the right environment at Wildwood in order to properly facilitate this kind of thinking and doing. Each member is charged with looking at their program area or realm of influence, to see how they can impact change for one person at a time.

And like change itself, the membership and focus of this group continues to evolve, as we celebrate some of our successes, as well as see where there is more work to be done. We would love to hear from you, our Wildwood Family about your thoughts on change, person-centered services and what the future holds as we move forward into this period that balances both uncertainty and opportunity.

Sincerely,

Danielle Mazza
Director of Medicaid Service Coordination
Wildwood Programs

OPWDD Plan

continued from p. 1

management organizations. The care management organizations will have agreements with service providers such as Wildwood and people will have the choice to determine which providers and services will meet their personal outcomes.

The managed care organization will assist the individual to access and coordinate their services and supports such as residential, habilitation, employment and respite services. This will also potentially include coordination of behavioral health and medical services as well. Most importantly OPWDD states that this redesign means that access to services will be easier to obtain and individuals and families will have increased choice and flexibility in securing the supports that they truly need.

OPWDD has said that this system redesign will be undertaken on a gradual basis. During the first year there will likely be few visible changes to the current system. However OPWDD will try out the new system of care by funding some new services within the managed care model during this time. All supports and services will be gradually transitioned to the new model within the five-year time period.

OPWDD has provided a great deal of information about the 1115 People First Waiver on their web site that includes questions and answers as well as on line videos with Commissioner Burke. The web site can be accessed by going to the link at www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011_waiver/index.jsp
Wildwood Programs’ Person Centered Approach

Person centered planning is, of course, nothing new to Wildwood Programs. Wildwood was founded on the principles that every individual has unique interests, strengths, needs and preferences. The planning process builds on a person’s strengths through the use of both staff and natural supports that reflect each person’s individuality and needs.

Although expressions like “thinking outside the box” have become cliché, a creative and flexible approach to the design of supports is exactly what is needed during the planning process. The following are examples of individuals who were ready to make changes in their lives, take some risk and plan with the goal of having a more satisfying life.

For some time a young woman had been living in a traditional community residence with three other women. She enjoyed living there but had longed for more independence. She didn’t want to sacrifice the support that she needed in her life but she also wanted the opportunity to have a life that was more on her own terms and similar to other women her age.

She and her family decided to look for a roommate to share an apartment with her—not staff but a woman of around the same age. It took some time to identify the right person but they did and she has recently moved into her own apartment with her new roommate and is experiencing life in a whole new way. She has a staff person who works with her several times a week to help out in areas where she needs support. Her family is close by and available if and when she needs them.

Similarly, two men who lived together in a community residence became ready for a more independent lifestyle in the community. A unique solution that seemed to work for everyone was conceived. They rented an apartment together close to an apartment that was supervised by paid staff. This gave them easy access to support staff when they needed it and independence when they didn’t. The men are thrilled and are safe and supported at the same time.

There is also a woman who has lived in an apartment supervised by staff from Wildwood Programs who has decided to get married. Her fiancé also lived in a supervised setting with another agency. The staff is working on a housing opportunity for the couple that will support them in their new life together while at the same time providing the support they need.

A young adult man was having a great deal of difficulty attending his last year in school. Eventually a plan was developed to help him transition to an adult day program. Unfortunately this was also not a viable alternative for him. A person centered planning process was convened where his interests, needs and strengths were put together to create a unique, individualized opportunity for him. He is now developing relationships in the community while pursuing activities that match his interests and respect his needs. He has also begun doing things in the community that he has never been able to do before. Several paid staff supports him in this and his family is available as well when he needs them.

There are many situations where traditional services are not the best fit for a person yet they continue to need specific levels of support. These examples aren’t blueprints for future plans but demonstrate how person centered planning can lead to richer lives. Careful planning can maximize opportunities while minimizing the risks involved.

The Government Advocacy Committee

The Government Advocacy Committee purpose is to advocate for the needs of the individuals and families Wildwood serves and with government leaders and the legislature. The committee has been working diligently on improving communication between the committee, consumers, staff and families and has been networking with other agencies regarding key advocacy issues.

All Wildwood family members are capable of being advocates and effective advocacy is often as simple as making a phone call or writing a letter. If you’re interested in joining the committee please contact one of the co-chairs Joe Fitzgerald (438-8773, jfitzgerald@siena.edu) or Kevin Baines (432-1237, kgbanes@e3communications.com).
One Person at a Time

continued from p. 1

what is important to them and not to let what we think is important for them become the main and only focus. Derrick also led a discussion about raising the bar and setting higher expectations for what we can achieve one person at a time as consumers, families and staff work together.

In this issue of Reaching Out you will see examples of how Wildwood is already “raising the bar” in our approach to person-centered services. We have worked with consumers, families, staff and natural supports to develop creative solutions to present challenges. These examples illustrate what worked for specific individuals but are not blueprints for what others should do in the future. The possibilities are endless in our renewed approach but only if you all join with us as we take on the challenge of truly seeing every individual as their own unique being.