2012 State of the State Address Implications

Tom Schreck
Director Of Communications

In his 2012 State of the State Address, Governor Andrew Cuomo spoke about supporting people with disabilities. The Governor called for a transformation in the way services are delivered and he emphasized the need for more fiscally responsible, as well as more morally acceptable standards for care.

"Many of the problems our disabled residents encounter are not the result of limited resources but rooted instead in failures in the organization and management of services," Governor Cuomo said.

He referenced the Supreme Court Case of Olmstead v. L.C. and said that people with disabilities deserve to receive care in the most integrated settings appropriate to their needs.

"We will develop an Olmstead Implementation Plan that will guide the transition of individuals from institutional to community based care, provide access to affordable and accessible housing and promote employment of persons with disabilities," the Governor said.

The Governor has clearly stated that Medicaid spending in New York State needs to be reigned in to bring New York State back to fiscal health. One of the ways that Governor Cuomo proposes to accomplish this is to limit spending for traditional, congregate programs and instead emphasize individualized services that are determined by a person’s needs.

Legislative Advocacy Day 2012

Eileen Marrone
Social Worker

On January 31, families, consumers, and staff from Wildwood joined many other agencies for the annual Legislative Advocacy Day at the New York State Capital. Armed with a packet of “talking points” and pre-planned appointments, people met with their legislators to advocate for funding and regulations that will help agencies to deliver the most effective services. This year, two of these talking points centered on The People First Waiver (1115 Waiver) and on the fact that a qualified direct support workforce is the key to the success of the services provided and to the health and well being of the individuals receiving services.

If parents had not taken on a strong advocacy role in the past, Wildwood and many other community agencies would not exist today. Ginny Rossuck, working closely with other families, many who remain active today, started Wildwood Programs because she couldn’t find adequate services for her son. Although she is retired from Wildwood, she continues to be a staunch advocate for her son, David, and his wife, Kathleen, and for the supports they receive.

We asked her what she sees as the important components of advocacy.
Dear Friends...

In my nearly 30 years with Wildwood, these last few have been among the most challenging for our leadership, staff, consumers, and families. First, our primary funding streams have been stagnant or reduced. While we have managed to avoid lay-offs, we have not been able to provide staff salary increases, a worrisome problem. Second, we have been barraged with new State regulations. Procedures and reporting requirements have been increased for fire drills, transporting consumers, supervision, incidents between consumers, and minor incidents between consumers and staff, to name just a few. These regulations also impose additional responsibilities for training, oversight, and record keeping. Third, we have unfortunately been impacted by State-wide publicity of several egregious and tragic cases of abuse. While none of these incidents are connected directly to Wildwood, we are impacted by association in a large industry composed of State operated and third party non-profit and for-profit providers. Lastly, the system for funding services through the Medicaid waiver process is being restructured in fundamental ways that will likely require significant adaptation in our business and service delivery practices; while we are embracing every opportunity to influence the design of the new system, in short, more change is yet to come.

Now more than ever each of us needs to exercise our individual roles to be creative in supporting our consumers and their families, and to inspire confidence in the integrity and quality of Wildwood’s program. The Programs Board and Executive Management are fully engaged in that effort, but what has impressed me most is the involvement and engagement of Wildwood’s staff. As staff, you have stuck with us through these hard times. As parents and Board members we are deeply grateful for your commitment and investment in our children and all the individuals and families Wildwood serves. You have been inspiring sources of creativity and courage in looking for efficiencies, in re-imagining different ways to provide high quality services in this new environment, and in retaining Wildwood’s reputation for innovation and approaches that are tailored to address the needs of our consumers on an individual basis. Each of Wildwood’s programs has benefited from your attentions and responses to these challenges. You even found a way to open a new residence – Best Road! The changes in some areas – e.g., Service Coordination, Wildwood School, Compliance and Quality Assurance – have been profound but ultimately, through your efforts, have strengthened our program, maintained focus on individual consumers and their needs, and helped to create a positive, engaged environment throughout the agency. Thank you.

Following the staff’s example, I urge us all to stay focused on our mission and values as we deal with the future. We cultivate a capacity for change in our consumers as a life skill. Each of us needs to accept that reality in our own Wildwood role going forward, and to have the courage to exploit the moment to find new and different ways to do what makes Wildwood such a special place – a place that provides opportunities for individuals to become all they can be.

William B. Hedberg
President
Wildwood Programs Board

State of the State

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tional group homes and day programs will continue to be available to those individuals who truly need that level of support. Otherwise, funding will be focused on services that promote employment first, home ownership, individualized living arrangements and supports that assist people to remain in their home and community.

The People First Waiver, also known as the 1115 Waiver, which is under negotiation between OPWDD and the Center For Medicare and Medicaid Services will drive Governor Cuomo’s policies regarding services for individuals with disabilities. It remains to be seen precisely how his State of the State Address suggestions will take shape as the 1115 Waiver is piloted and implemented over the next decade.

Wildwood is already examining how to proactively internally organize to be ready for change and to best meet the needs of the people we serve. Community Integration Teams are being formed to strategize and implement more person-centered and flexible ways of meeting individual consumers’ needs and desires. In- Home Respite Services will be piloted shortly to offer additional support to families whose loved ones may be remaining at home for longer than previously expected.

Wildwood Employment Services is creatively diversifying how it supports consumers. A new hands-on laboratory designed to simulate retail technology is being developed complete with cash registers and other computerized technology similar to what is found in today’s retail outlets. The goal is to help job candidates practice skills that will make them more marketable and ready for potential employers.

On Tuesday March 27th, the Governor and State Legislative leaders announced that they had reached a final budget agreement for fiscal year 2012-13. The final budget was consistent with predictions about its direction and implications for people with disabilities and service agencies.
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“I see the advocacy role of families as two fold – individual advocacy and systems advocacy. Not every family can go to a legislative advocacy day, but everyone can and should do something to safeguard the services and supports they and their children need,” Ginny said.

She stresses that numbers count and families can call, write or e-mail their legislators, all making a difference. They can ask others to join their advocacy efforts including adult children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and neighbors.

“These issues carry far more meaning to legislators when they are personalized, communicating that there are many, many voters for whom these are very important issues,” Ginny said.

Families need to educate themselves about what is happening in the system today, primarily, as a result of the budget shortfall. It is important that we educate our legislators about the needs of our family members and the long term human and fiscal cost benefit to our State and country of investing in our children and adults lives. Change can be good but we need to remain alert to what these changes will really mean to our families.

“We need to help legislators understand what life is like for the staff who serve our children or adults. The workforce for our children and adults must be of high quality, well trained and stable,” Ginny said.

Due to the large increase in government mandates for reporting, staff who choose this line of work, are frustrated by hours of written paperwork. In addition, these dedicated and creative staff are grossly underpaid for the important work they are doing and we, as families must advocate for them. It is important that those who govern understand that many of our staff must work one or two additional jobs to support their family in order to continue working with our children and adults.

“Families need to learn about The People First Waiver and what mandatory managed care will mean for our loved ones. A ‘managed care system’ must be molded to meet the developing needs of our children and adults, enabling them to grow safely towards greater fulfillment, independence and productivity with the supports that they need.”

Ginny said that through her professional experience as well as being David’s Mom,

“If a person has the necessary intense support in the beginning, they can eventually gain skills and move to less supports in the future. We must work to be sure the managed care delivery system will reflect this,” Ginny said.

Her second piece of advice is that families can best advocate for their children by nurturing the staff who guide and support their child or adult.

“If we give 90% positive, but genuine feedback, that gives us the right to share concerns when we have them. Staff want and need to hear our opinions. We know our children and will be a long-term source of support for them. However, our knowledge needs to be delivered in a manner that can be heard and understood,”

Ginny said. “We, as families, also need to listen to the staff and hear their vision because they can sometimes look ahead when we are not yet ready to do that”.

WILDWOOD PROGRAMS
FREE WORKSHOP SERIES

To Register for workshops please call 640-3400
There is no charge for attendance.
All workshops meet at Wildwood Programs Latham Office,
1190 Troy Schenectady Rd, Latham, NY 12110

SUPPLEMENTAL NEEDS Trusts
Tuesday, May 15, 2012 7:00pm – 8:30pm
Ed Wilcenski, Attorney
In planning for the future, many parents are concerned about maintaining their child’s eligibility for benefits such as SSI and Medicaid, but they also want to be sure that there are funds available for uncovered medical expenses, recreational activities, and the important “quality of life extras”. A Supplemental Needs Trust provides a mechanism by which families can appoint someone to manage funds for an individual with a disability. The trust can be used to provide a source of funds without jeopardizing governmental benefits.

A FAMILY GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY & BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT
Danielle Mazza, Director of Medicaid Service Coordination, Wildwood Programs
Michelle Brown, Community Bridge Builder, Wildwood Residential Programs
Victoria Shear, Parent & Medicaid Service Coordinator, Wildwood Programs
Wednesday, May 9, 2012 9-11 am
This workshop will share strategies on how to build productive relationships that will help you be an effective advocate for your family member. The speakers will share their perspectives as a parent, as service coordinators, and as a community bridge builder who serves as an ambassador to help people build lasting connections in the communities in which they live.

TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
Dr. Marianne Simon, Psychologist, Wildwood Programs
Monday, May 21, 2012 9-10:30 am
For many of us, the ability to relate and communicate with others is so engrained into our daily lives that we don’t give much thought to how we go about navigating the routine social encounters we have with our families, friends, or co-workers. However, for some people with developmental disabilities social skills, such as being polite or waiting one’s turn can be far from automatic. Dr. Simon will explore the topic of social skill deficits in people with developmental disabilities and will provide concrete tips on how to engage the whole family in teaching social skills at home and in the community.
Working Toward Transformation

Danielle Mazza
Director of Medicaid Service Coordination

In February, a group of Wildwood staff attended a two-day workshop on “Agency and Individual Transformation”. It was sponsored by NYSAACRA, one of the leading advocacy organizations that represent both individuals with disabilities and the agencies that support them. Michael Kendrick, a well-known international consultant whose work comprises leadership development, social integration and change, innovation and advocacy, was the presenter.

The People First Waiver, also known as the 1115 Waiver, will definitely bring changes and we felt that this training was extremely timely. The future will mean change for all of us and we are doing all we can to be prepared.

The training emphasized the need for each agency to define itself, its mission and its goals and objectives relative to the people served. In recent years the majority of our program design was dictated by OPWDD and its funding mechanisms. As change becomes the hallmark of our field, we have a unique opportunity to support individuals in more unique and individualized ways, rather than turning to congregate settings.

There was significant focus on having the “right relationship” with those we support and their families. The importance of having an enhanced partnering and self-determined relationship between the individual receiving services and the agency providing those services was also emphasized.

It is quite likely that the supports and services we’re accustomed to will look different in the future. Instead of rigidly clinging to what we’ve known we are now challenged with the idea of creating new models with the people we serve and their families to best meet their needs. Change can be frightening but we can also choose to view change as a transformation filled with opportunity.