

reaching out

Summer 2013

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Wildwood Programs is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization that serves people with developmental disabilities, complex learning disabilities and autism. Wildwood is affiliated with the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA).



Wildwood Programs
LEARNING FOR LIFE

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OPWDD's Transformation Agenda

As we have discussed in previous issues of *Reaching Out*, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities is undergoing significant change in an attempt to transform its system of supports and services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The goal is to modernize outdated system structures that have at times limited individuals' independence and attainment of personal goals and create a more person-centered approach to meeting needs and supporting desired outcomes.

It is critical that families understand these changes as they will very likely have impact on the supports that are provided to those currently receiving services as well as people who are seeking new services or requesting them for the first time. OPWDD refers to this change process as its *Transformation Agenda* and within that agenda has established several priorities. Among those priorities are reforms that will promote more person centered supports, restructuring to ensure more integrated and holistic ways of supporting people, establishing transparent and sustainable funding, measuring the quality of services based on the desired outcomes of individuals, and serving people in the most integrated community settings possible.

Expanding the options for self-direction of services is central to the agenda. The Front Door and the Coordinated Assessment System are key parts of this direction and both strive to help people seeking services identify individualized needs and to offer supports accordingly, rather than seeking an "opening" in a "program." The over arching goal is to identify each person's unique needs and challenges and match them with tailored supports.

The agenda also places a high priority on helping people develop housing opportunities that are in the most integrated community settings. Creative supportive housing options such as shared living are highly valued and encouraged. Traditional group residential homes will not go away but openings will only be available for designated individuals who are considered by OPWDD to be members of priority populations such as those currently living out of state and those living in developmental centers.

OPWDD is also committed to increasing employment and meaningful volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities. Job readiness and pre-employment services that help individuals transition to work are important components in helping people move from site based day habilitation to employment. OPWDD has directed that there will no longer be new enrollments into sheltered workshops as emphasis is on job development, training and coaching.

There are also important efforts to improve safety, quality and to measure personal outcomes. The goals of this system re-design of supports, programs and funding is to create more meaningful, integrated and individualized opportunities that can be fiscally sustained and can meet the needs of the person.

Dear Friends...



Dear Wildwood Supporters,

Some of you may not yet know me. My name is Lou Deepe and my role within Wildwood is to help support service development in the organization and help us adapt to this ever-changing environment. As you can imagine, that is daunting and exciting all at the same time, especially now! I'm writing this introduction because of my role in aligning Wildwood's development with the needs and wants of individuals and families, as well as our funding partners.

In our last issue of Reaching Out, we shared information on changes being implemented by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). These changes include restructuring how people gain access to OPWDD funded services (the "Front Door"), to help better inform people of the support options that are available to them; helping more individuals to become employed and independent of "site-based" day programs; and partnering with individuals and families to help them be more self-directing in their supports, giving them more control in their lives.

In this issue, we want to highlight these themes by sharing specific examples of how Wildwood's efforts partnering with individuals and families are aligning with OPWDD's goals and vision. You will read about a gentleman supported in our day services that has become successfully employed and how he is now spending his days differently. We will also share examples of our efforts to work with three students graduating from Wildwood School as well as a young man living with his family to help them plan lives in their community that are independent from traditional, certified settings.

All of these examples involve thinking differently, whether it's about our current support system and the "programs" that we operate within, or about our roles and how we can support people better. At the core of all of these efforts is our belief that people deserve to have control of their lives and to be true members of their community. We hope that these examples will inspire and help you or someone you know achieve and lead an amazing life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Lou Deepe".

Lou Deepe
Director of Strategic Development

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Visit our web page at <http://www.wildwood.edu>

The Move Toward Employment

Josh Muchmore, Director of Employment Services

OPWDD has been very clear in its transformation agenda that it wants an emphasis placed on employment for people with disabilities. They have set goals to increase the number of individuals in competitive employment positions and they want those currently not employed to be working toward employment.

Partly in response to this agenda Wildwood has created the Vocational Continuum. In the past Wildwood has had “programs”: a school program, a work-based learning program, a day habilitation program, a transition-to-work program, a supported employment program.

However, our lives and the lives of the individuals that we support often do not fit neatly into such programmatic compartments and it’s important that we do everything we can to help students and adults attain the skills, experiences, and aptitudes necessary to be successful in the workforce and other daily vocational pursuits. In response to that need Wildwood is in the process of creating a more seamless blend of supports that is designed to provide individuals with whatever training and experiential learning is necessary to help them grow to their fullest potential.

There are challenges and barriers to this effort. They include:

1. How do we make sure that the training we provide is actually equipping people for “real” jobs?
2. How do we maximize our relationships with businesses in our community?
3. How do we give young adults consistent access to the technology resources that can help them be successful?
4. How do we assess whether or not we’re helping people grow toward their potential?
5. How do we share assessment information so that - regardless of age or life domain - we’re all on the same page?
6. How do we help individuals and families work through fears about loss of benefits?

The answer to these challenges involves combining efforts across departments, duties and other boundaries. This is happening in pockets now, but we have a vision to see it expand across the entire agency as we move forward into a new era. Accordingly, we are developing six areas of specialty that will help to address the most frequently occurring barriers.

The six themes within the Vocational Continuum focus on addressing the challenges that could possibly interfere with an individual’s success. They are:

1. “Real” training for real jobs
2. Building effective business relationships
3. Use of technology to enable vocational growth
4. GPS (Growth-Based Portfolio System) - Vocational focus
5. Coordinated intake and assessment
6. Benefits counseling

We are excited about moving into this new era and believe it is an exciting time filled with opportunities and possibilities for the people with whom we partner.

Eddie’s Story

Jean Miller, Clifton Park Day Services

Eddie O’Hearn participates in Wildwood’s STEP Program based in Clifton Park. The STEP Program is designed to help people develop vocational skills that lead to competitive employment opportunities.

Eddie is a friendly young man who expressed a desire to work and earn a paycheck. The staff in the STEP Program collaborated with Rich Meacham, who is an Employment Specialist with Wildwood, to help Eddie design a plan to build and refine the soft skills needed to be hired. Eddie took part in small classes that built and refined his social skills, helped him create a resume, and provided opportunities for him to volunteer in the community to practice what he learned.

After gaining the important STEP Program experience Eddie’s dream came true when he was hired at the Hess station near the Clifton Park Day Services in February of 2013. He worked with Chris Heine, one of the Day Hab staff, to complete the mandatory online training course for Hess and Chris then worked with Eddie around the specific skills he’d need for Hess. This collaboration resulted in a seamless transition from practicing skills to putting these skills into practice on the job.

Eddie’s supervisor has been so happy with his work performance that she has given him an extra shift and she raves about how well he completes his work. Eddie is now an example for his peers on how working hard and setting goals can lead to fantastic outcomes.



Person-Centered Supports at Home

Marie Awn Floyd, Family Support Services

OPWDD's transformation agenda lays out the commitments that New York State is making to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. One of OPWDD's priorities is to promote the development of supports that not only meet the needs of individuals, but that are also community-based and person-centered.

Wildwood Programs recognizes the value and benefits of this agenda and has developed in-home respite services and in-home behavior support services to provide person-centered supports to individuals in their homes and to help families maintain their family member with a disability in their home and community.

In-home respite provides highly individualized, one to one staff support in the home to the child or adult who has a disability. Families and individuals with disabilities participate in selecting their respite staff and co-manage the service by determining their own respite schedule. Respite workers develop safe, caring and nurturing relationships with the family member with a disability. This relationship promotes opportunities for growth and learning during leisure and recreational activities as well as activities of daily living.

Respite offers caregivers the opportunity for relief from the stress of caring for a family member with a disability, as well as the chance to care for other family members in the home, and to spend valuable time pursuing adult interests and activities outside of the home. Families often express that in-home respite lets them "re-charge" and return to parenting refreshed.

In-home behavior support services are focused, person-centered and on-going supports to families who are caring for individuals living at home that exhibit challenging behaviors. The behavior support specialist engages the individual, his or her family and caregivers, school personnel, support staff, counselors, and others in the person's support circle, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the individual. This holistic approach provides information to create an effective behavior support plan as well as the tools and strategies that are needed to promote positive behaviors.

In-home respite and behavior support services offer support to both the individual with a disability as well as to family members. In addition, they contribute to an environment that promotes growth and learning and supports the individual being a valued and productive member of their family and community.

A Home of His Own

Michelle Singh, Family Support Services

Chris Schelker is a 32-year-old man who lives with his parents, Isabelle and Peter, in Albany, NY. Chris is originally from Staten Island, but moved with his parents to Albany in November 2007. When Chris was nine years old an aide named Jackie from the Center for Family Support lived with the family and provided the supports to him. Chris was 20 when Jackie ended her work with him. Isabelle reports "Jackie loved Chris. She loved him right away". Jackie's presence in the Schelkers' lives was a huge benefit to the whole family as she provided direct support to Chris that he required and was able to give Isabelle and Peter some respite from care giving.

Today Chris attends Wildwood Programs Day Services on Central Avenue in Albany. He also receives community habilitation services from Wildwood during the week and on weekends. Chris loves to be active; he is a member of the YMCA and loves to walk, swim and use the hot tub with his direct support professionals. Chris also enjoys bowling, visiting the library, grocery shopping and attending plays in Washington Park. Although Chris has limited verbal abilities, he has excellent receptive communication skills and understands much of what is said to him. Most importantly, Chris is an extremely likeable young man.

When Isabelle turned 70, she and Peter realized that they needed a change in their life in terms of supporting Chris. However, they also wanted Chris to remain in his home forever. In fact, they purchased their home in Albany in 2007 with the hope that Chris would eventually live in one part of the house with supports while they lived in another part of the home. Chris's parents started thinking about how they could replicate the support that the family had received from Jackie with Chris's daily routines and the chores that he needed to complete at home.

In January 2013, Isabelle attended a Circle of Support training provided by Rensselaer ARC and hosted by Wildwood. After the training, she approached Wildwood about assisting the family to develop a shared living arrangement for Chris on the ground

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A Home of His Own

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floor of their duplex. About two months ago, staff from Wildwood went to see the Schelkers' home and made some suggestions about how to renovate the house to make it appropriate for a live-in staff. The family has already made these renovations to the home. In addition, the Schelkers were encouraged to start working on identifying people that the family would like to include in Chris's support circle. The hope is that Chris eventually will live on the ground level of his home with a live-in staff person and receive the support that he needs from a collaborative effort of agency staff, his family and support circle.

There is a great deal of work yet to be done to make Chris's home into a reality. The family will apply to OPWDD for funding through Consolidated Supports and Services; will solidify Chris's support circle; will work with a start up broker and support broker; will identify, hire and train live in staff and will make decisions about Chris's needs and how to and who will respond to them. However, it is the partnership between the Schelkers, Wildwood and Chris's circle of support that will ensure the integrity of his life at home.

Family and Professional Trainings

Teaching Social Skills to Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders in their Natural Environment

Marianne Simon, PsyD, Wildwood Programs Psychologist, will discuss the concept of Theory of Mind and how mastery of it relates to the acquisition of social skills. Marianne will present pragmatic tools and suggestions that can enhance empathy and teach social skills.

Date: Friday, September 27, 2013 Time: 10am-12noon

Strategies and Tools for Caregivers

Kim Sumner, M.A., Wildwood Programs In Home Behavior Support Specialist, presents strategies and tools that will enable children to become more independent in life skills that are relevant to their developmental age. Kim will explain the use of prompts and fading and will present useful strategies related to toilet training, hygiene, social boundaries and competencies and body awareness.

Date: Friday, October 4, 2013 Time: 9:30am-11:00am

Healthy Plate; Healthy Life

Gail Doering, Wildwood Programs Dietician, will discuss how individuals with disabilities can have many challenges with eating and may make very limited food choices. She will share strategies that can successfully address these issues. Gail will also explain how the recent USDA meal planning guideline known as "My Plate" can be used as a guide to realistically support people to eat healthy, balanced meals.

Date: Thursday, October 24, 2013 Time: 9:30am-11:00am

OPWDD Front Door Orientation

Representatives from the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities will identify the necessary steps for individuals, and their families, seeking services and supports funded by OPWDD. Participants will hear about the process of eligibility and the various types of service options including self directed services.

Date: Wednesday, October 2, 2013 Time: 9am-11noon

Life After High School: What's Next?

Lou Deepe, Wildwood Programs Director Strategic Development, and Josh Muchmore, Director Vocational Development, along with transition staff and a certified benefits practitioner, will discuss supports related to work and daytime activities that are available to individuals who are preparing to leave school. They will also present on specific funding mechanisms and models that allow for more flexibility and are responsive to individual choice and need. There will also be a discussion on the role a person's natural supports can play in the planning and implementation of supports and information about benefits and how they are not always barriers to employment.

Date: Tuesday, October 29, 2013 Time: 9:30am-11:30am

Home, Housing and Community Opportunities

Anne Murphy, Wildwood Programs Director of Home and Housing Development, and Danielle Mazza, Director of Community Development, will discuss the changing way to access services through the "Front Door", CSS (Consolidated Support and Services) and self determination for those seeking residential and community opportunities. They will also present the benefits of partnership between family, individual and service provider. Discussion of ways to access traditional services such as site based day habilitation and residential programs have changed to meet the needs of emergent priority populations.

Date: Tuesday, November 19, 2013 Time: 9:30am-11:00am

**Location: Wildwood Programs Latham Office,
3rd Floor Conference Rooms,
1190 Troy Schenectady Rd, Building 1,
Latham, NY 12110**

Call 518-640-3300 to register.

There is no charge for attendance.

Graduation and Self Determination

Danielle Mazza, Medicaid Service Coordination

Graduation is an exciting time in a young person's life. It heralds adulthood and a time to make choices and decisions about the future. For many Wildwood School graduates this means making choices about day habilitation programs or employment options but for three Wildwood graduates this year, it means literally designing their own futures.

Through the use of Consolidated Supports and Services each young man is crafting what his post school life will look like. Rather than attempting to fit in to an existing service, each is determined to stand out. The hallmark of CSS is self determination, which means each young man is not only making decisions about how to spend his time, but also given authority over a budget and will work with Wildwood on how he would like to spend his money. Each is able to recruit, hire and co-manage his staff and schedule. CSS provides for flexible supports that can also fund adult educational pursuits and community memberships, which has been quite popular.

I'm lucky enough to be working with each young man as his startup broker. It is wonderful to see each rise to the occasion and be very specific about what he wants to pursue and what he wants his supports to look like. Through utilizing a "relationship map" each young man freely chose his Circle of Support, which is a group of people who support him in the decision making process. Each identified a peer or peers to be a part of his Circle, and these friends have turned out to be some of the most vocal and participatory members. Goals range from starting one's own anime club, space simulation, video production, employment, fitness, cat rescue, and obtaining one's GED.

I tell each young man he is a pioneer, as this service option is new at Wildwood, and we are discovering how it all works together. We anticipate this will be a popular option for several of the 2014 graduates and I am hoping some of these young men will be able to act as mentors for those who will be following in their footsteps.

Family and Community Services Presents

A FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Through a variety of engaging methods, children will learn the social skills needed to make and keep friends. Topics will include perspective taking, emotional self-regulation, recognizing verbal and non-verbal cues, good sportsmanship, conversational skills and more. Most of all, we will have FUN!

Who: Children ages 7-12 with high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder, capable of engaging in a group of 6-8 children.

When: Wednesdays for 8 weeks - Oct. 2 - Nov. 20, 2013 **Time:** 3:30 - 5:00 PM

Where: Wildwood Programs Latham Office, 1190 Troy-Schenectady Rd., Bldg. #1, Latham, NY, 3rd floor - Conference room A

Cost: \$20 registration fee

Group Leader: Vicki Michela, M.Ed., Family Support Specialist and Kim Sumner, M.A. Behavior Support Specialist

For more information or to apply, contact Vicki Michela at 640-3327 or vmichela@wildwood.edu

TOPIC-BASED SPEAKER GROUPS AND OPEN DISCUSSION

August 22nd: 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Front Door Orientation - presented by Barb Kirby

October 3rd: 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Open Discussion about current issues

Please Join us! RSVP to Michelle Singh, Family & Community Services at 518.640.3350 or msingh@wildwoodprograms.org.