



OPWDD Community Dialogue Summary  
September 27, 2013

The following is a summary of stakeholder feedback from the eight Community Dialogues convened September 16-26, 2013.

Region 1- September 17, 2013

- Concerns were raised by parents of children in their 40s who have attended workshops for over 20 years. Their children are happy, have a sense of pride about the work they are doing, have friends and enjoy receiving a paycheck.
- Parents are looking for more clarity on what will happen to people who have unsuccessfully tried working in the community and are now doing well in a workshop.
- Concerns were raised about whether state and federal expectations regarding transition to competitive employment are realistic.
- It was suggested that the current workshop model be changed to meet state and federal employment expectations rather than be eliminated.
- Concerns were raised about the possible emotional and psychological stress that could be caused if people must transition to competitive employment.
- Self advocates raised concerns about transportation and stressed that community employment is not possible if people do not have reliable transportation. OPWDD was strongly encouraged to work with local transportation authorities to create better options for people with disabilities who want to be engaged in their community.
- It was suggested that transportation be covered in SEMP rates because the cost in the long-term would be less than supporting someone in day hab.
- It was suggested that Consolidated Supports and Services (CSS) be utilized as a way to transition people from workshops to employment.
- It was suggested that OPWDD focus on educating businesses about hiring people with disabilities and that there should be outreach to counties and workforce investment boards.
- It was suggested that financial incentives should be available to encourage providers to change their business model which will create jobs in integrated settings.



Region 2- September 18, 2013

- Concerns were raised by parents with children in their 40s who have attended workshops for over 20 years. Parents gave examples of the emotional and psychological stress that would be caused by the transition to community employment.
- Providers raised concerns about the feasibility of converting to alternative business models.
- Concerns were raised about the need for a safety net for people who may not be successful in employment and the need to provide sufficient supports on the job.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of jobs in rural parts of the state.
- It was suggested that OPWDD visit the people who are employed in workshops and ask them what they want.
- Concerns were raised about the use of the terms Person Centered and Transition Planning when most people don't really understand the process to engage individuals and families. It was suggested that technical assistance be provided so there really is good person centered transition planning.
- Concerns were raised about the type of retirement options that will be available for people transitioning from workshops and whether it would be possible for people to retire from day hab.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of choice available to people if they want to remain in a workshop.
- Concerns were raised about the interpretation of the Olmstead Decision and whether it requires workshops to be closed.
- Concerns were raised about the use of ISPM scores to identify people who should transition to competitive employment.
- It was suggested that assessments should not only focus on ability but also include what a person wants to do with their life and should factor in the perspectives of a person's circle of support.
- Concerns were raised about the options for people who can only be successful in sheltered employment.
- Questions were raised about the future of Supported Employment Funding and whether the Enhanced Supported Employment Pilot will continue.
- Questions were raised about whether Day Habilitation will also face closure.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of transportation in rural parts of the state and the need to fund transportation in Supported Employment.



- Concerns were raised about whether businesses are willing to hire people with disabilities.
- Questions were raised about the willingness of community members to accept people with disabilities.

### Region 3- September 19, 2013

- Self advocates shared their successful transition from a workshop to employment but stressed that it is important for others to have the workshop option.
- It was suggested that the decision to close workshops be reconsidered and that state and federal entities renegotiate that section of the Transformation Agreement.
- Work centers were described as vocational training centers that not only prepare people for competitive employment but provide a safety net if people are not successful.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of a safety net in the plan and it was suggested that workshops could be transformed to serve that purpose.
- Concerns were raised that people will either attend day hab or stay home if workshops are closed.
- It was suggested that more focus be put on “choice” and that the plan should focus on the creation of new services that provide more choices for people.
- Families questioned why the choice of being employed in a workshop is being eliminated.
- There were questions about whether the Olmstead Decision really requires the elimination of workshops if it is the most integrated setting appropriate to a person’s needs.
- It was suggested that there needs to be a broader vision of what it means for people with developmental disabilities to be members of their community. This vision should include the creation of more options instead of eliminating options.
- It was suggested that self employment be an option for people interested in transitioning from workshops.
- Concerns were raised about people with forensic backgrounds and the prevocational training role that workshops currently provide. There was a question about how people with forensic histories will be supported to obtain jobs in the community.



#### Region 4- Monday September 16, 2013

- Concerns were raised about the decision to end new enrollments in workshops.
- Concerns were raised about people with medical and behavioral needs. There was doubt that businesses would be willing to hire people with complex needs.
- The concept of everyone having the ability to work was challenged.
- Concerns were raised about people on the autism spectrum that would have a difficult time working in an environment with lots of people, sounds and other distractions.
- Questions were asked as to whether people who are unable to work will be able to attend day hab.
- It was suggested that OPWDD provide more funding and programmatic flexibility in order to achieve the employment goals by ending the silos between day hab and supported employment. This would allow for a more global approach to addressing the needs of people currently receiving workshop services.
- Concerns were raised about the availability of the staffing supports that will be needed to successfully transition people from workshops to competitive employment. It was suggested that the concept of fading job coaching supports should be eliminated.
- It was suggested that clinical supports be available to assist people with the emotional and psychological stresses associated with competitive employment.
- It was suggested that families be very engaged in the Employment Transformation Plan and that they be involved in the person-centered transition process for their loved ones.

#### Region 5- September 17, 2013

- Concerns were raised about the role of MSCs in the transition process from workshops to competitive employment. The need to have a clear role for the MSC was stressed.
- It was suggested that there be multiple paths to employment.
- CSS was suggested as a model that could be very successful in transitioning people to employment.
- ACCES-VR raised concerns about self directed employment services and the qualifications of job coaches not employed by a supported employment agency.



- It was suggested that volunteer opportunities be expanded and that farms could create integrated opportunities for people with disabilities to work with other community members.

#### Statewide- September 20, 2013

- A Western NY parent raised concerns about transportation and the stresses it will cause working parents if reliable transportation is not available. An example was given of the paperwork, rules and frustration currently experienced with para transit. Concerns were raised about how unreliable transportation can cause someone to be fired from their job.
- A Long Island self advocate described how there are some people employed at workshops who earn at or above minimum wage depending on their productivity. It was explained that the workshop is a better employment option for someone who needs personal care assistance. The need for reliable transportation was also raised.
- A Broome sibling raised concerns about how unrealistic it is to expect people in their 60s to find employment in the community. Concerns were also raised about the unemployment rate across the state and how challenging it will be for people with disabilities to be hired.
- In Finger Lakes, it was suggested that the decision to close workshops be reconsidered and alternatives to workshops should be developed before talking about closure. Concerns were raised about the definition of “integrated setting” because for some people the workshop is the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Concerns were also raised about people with behavioral challenges who will have difficulty finding a business willing to hire them.
- In the Capital District, it was suggested that OPWDD partner with the State Education Department to work with schools to prepare students for employment.
- A Hudson Valley parent and MSC raised concerns about the needs of people with autism and the social and emotional stresses they would endure if forced to work in competitive employment instead of a workshop. It was also stressed that people who transition from workshops must have the necessary job coaching supports to be successful.
- A Long Island self advocate and support staff shared their experience with self direction and how CSS has been used to create



the live envisioned by the circle of support. They shared how CSS was used to identify employment interest and led to finding a job.

- A Long Island parent talked about self direction as a very person centered option for people who want to work. The importance of doing good person centered planning was stressed. It was also suggested that OPWDD work more closely with the State Education Department and reach out to the Department of Labor regarding rules for volunteering in for-profit companies. The importance of person centered assessment was stressed along with the need to end agency and programmatic silos.
- A parent raised concerns about the options that will be available to students leaving high school since there are no new enrollments in workshops. There was also a question about the types of supports that will be available for people who want to work. Concerns were also raised about whether there are employers who are willing to hire people with disabilities.
- In Finger Lakes, there were comments about the importance of transportation and the need to coordinate transportation among providers. There is a model currently used for senior services that should be explored. The importance of connecting with the Department of Labor One Stop Centers was also raised.
- In Finger Lakes, concerns were raised about rural communities where transportation is not an option and where the community is mostly agricultural. Agricultural jobs are not for everyone so would provide limited opportunities for people transitioning from workshops.
- In Western NY, it was suggested that there is no need to close workshops and that it will only cause chaos for families, providers, staff and workshop participants. Concerns were also raised about the lengthy about of time it takes for someone to receive supported employment services.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of workshop closure on businesses that have contracts with provider agencies. It was argued that this decision could erode the relationship and trust that providers have with local businesses. Concerns were also raised about transitioning people to integrated work settings where they no longer have a choice in disclosing their disability.
- In Central NY, concerns were raised about people in their 40s who have been employed in workshops over 20 years and the unrealistic



expectation of thinking they will be successful in competitive employment.

- In Long Island, concerns were raised about the State Education Department and the need for schools to do better transition planning.
- In Sunmount, concerns were raised about the Justice Center requirements for hiring direct support professional and the impact this will have on employment services. Concerns were raised about whether the Olmstead Decision truly requires workshops to be eliminated. It was suggested that outreach be done to regional economic development councils to educate businesses about hiring people with disabilities.
- In the Capital District, concerns were raised about the decision to end new enrollments in workshops and as a result there is no new workforce to work on contracts and business is being turned away.
- In Taconic, there was a suggestion to explore the affirmative business model. Questions were also raised about the future of the 14c Certificate from Department of Labor which authorizes the payment of subminimum wage.
- In Hudson Valley, it was suggested that there be a continuum of services for people with workshops as an option. It was suggested that competitive employment may not be the right option for everyone. The need for a safety net was also stressed. Concerns were also raised about how unrealistic competitive employment is for people in their 40s who have been employed in workshops for over 20 years.
- It was suggested that state and federal entities talk to people receiving workshop services and find out what they want before a final decision is made to close workshops.
- It was suggested that incentives be created for businesses to hire people with disabilities and that opportunities be created to connect businesses with people from workshops who they could potentially hire.
- A Long Island parent raised concerns about the possibility of their loved one transitioning from paid employment to day hab. Specific concerns related to the lost of a paycheck and the lack of activities in day hab to maintain their loved one's interest.



### Statewide- September 26, 2013

- In Broome, concerns were raised by parents with loved ones who work in workshops. They strongly oppose the policy decision to end new enrollments into workshops and don't believe that alternatives to workshops are necessary. They also raised concerns about eliminating workshops as a service option because it limits their choices. A suggestion was made to implement the plan on a small scale instead of statewide.
- In Central NY, self advocates shared their experiences working in an enclave and described how they preferred employment in an enclave because the wages in workshops are low.
- A suggestion was made to allow providers who are in the process of converting to either an affirmative business or social enterprise to enroll new participants.
- There were several suggestions for OPWDD to engage families, providers and self advocates in more discussions before the decision is made to eliminate funding for workshops.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of employment options in rural parts of the state
- In Sunmount, a parent raised concerns about the need for a safety net for people who are unable to find employment. Concerns were raised about the need for adequate job coaching supports to assist people in finding and maintaining employment. Concerns were also raised about programmatic cuts that make it difficult for providers to be flexible enough to support people who want to work.
- In Long Island, a parent talked about his experience with Consolidated Supports and Services and how it can be used to help people obtain community employment as long as flexibility is maintained. Concerns were raised about language in the plan that is focused on job readiness instead of focusing on what people with developmental diversity can do. It was also suggested that OPWDD think creatively about ways to get businesses to foster acceptance and tolerance within their companies and hiring practices. The need for public service announcements about hiring people with developmental diversity was also suggested.
- In the Capital District, a provider talked about the importance of volunteering and the need for comprehensive transportation solutions to assist people in getting to their jobs.
- Concerns were raised about the availability for supports for people with extensive medical needs transitioning from workshops to integrated work settings.
- Concerns were raised about bullying in the workplace and the supports that will be available to people who are working.
- Concerns were raised about the future of staff employed at workshops.
- Suggestions were made for OPWDD and ACCES-VR to collaborate in order to ensure that people are successful in achieving their employment goals.



- Recommendations were made to create better tools in schools to improve students' skills and prepare them for employment.