

**NEW YORK PLAN TO INCREASE COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
Final Approved Plan-May 1, 2014**

**I. Introduction**

In accordance with the Health System Transformation for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Agreement as defined in the Special Terms and Conditions, this document sets forth New York State's strategies and plan toward increasing competitive employment. This plan describes specific strategies to: increase the number of individuals engaged in competitive employment; increase the number of students that transition from high school to competitive employment; collaborate with the educational system to ensure that stakeholders are aware of employment services; and transition workshop participants to competitive employment or other meaningful community activities.

**II. Increasing the number of individuals and high school students in competitive employment.**

Competitive employment is defined as employment in an integrated setting, in the general workforce, where a person earns at least minimum wage. In order to increase the number of people who are competitively employed there must be growth in the number of new people receiving supported employment services. New York will encourage growth in supported employment by creating a career planning service to assist individuals with the transition to competitive employment and by working collaboratively with the Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) and the New York State Commission for the Blind.

**1. Create Pathway to Employment**

Pathway to Employment is a new person-centered, comprehensive career planning and support service that will provide assistance for participants to obtain, maintain or advance in competitive employment or self-employment. The service will be available by summer of 2014. It is a focused, time limited service that engages a participant in identifying a career direction, provides instruction and training in pre-employment skills, and develops a plan for achieving competitive, integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within 12 months, or sooner, the outcome of this service is documentation of the participant's stated career objective; a detailed career plan used to guide individual employment supports; preparation for supported employment services and obtainment of a job.

The Pathway to Employment service will be available to anyone who needs additional supports before transitioning to supported employment or needs supports to assist them in maintaining or advancing in employment (this would include individuals currently receiving supported employment services who are interested in furthering their career, obtaining additional hours in their current job or seeking a different type of employment). Individuals receiving either voluntary agency or state operated day habilitation, prevocational or workshop services and high school students will have the option of receiving Pathway to Employment services.

In an effort to ensure that Pathway to Employment services result in an increase in the number of people engaged in competitive employment, the service will only be authorized to be provided by supported employment agencies. In addition, voluntary agency and state operated providers will be required to complete an OPWDD approved training prior to the delivery of Pathway to Employment services.

Once Pathway to Employment services are available, OPWDD will work with providers to educate families and individuals currently receiving day habilitation, prevocational and workshop services about the service and how it can assist them in the transition to competitive employment.

## 2. Connect Individuals to ACCES-VR and the NYS Commission for the Blind

OPWDD will work collaboratively with ACCES-VR and the Commission for the Blind to increase the number of individuals with developmental disabilities who successfully obtain and maintain competitive employment. All individuals that apply for OPWDD services will receive information about the availability of supported employment services and will be given the opportunity to receive Pathway to Employment services. OPWDD's regional offices will partner with local ACCES-VR and Commission for the Blind offices to identify the most appropriate service that will assist an individual in becoming competitively employed. Upon completion of the Pathway to Employment service some individuals may transition to ACCES-VR or Commission for the Blind for supported employment services, while other individuals may transition to OPWDD supported employment services. In addition, Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs) will be educated about Pathway to Employment and Supported Employment supports and services which will assist them in providing information to families.

## 3. Collaborate with State Education Department

Both ACCES-VR and the Office of Special Education (OSE) are within the New York State Education Department (SED). OPWDD will work with the educational system to educate stakeholders about supported employment services. Discussions are currently

underway between OPWDD and ACCES-VR to create a Supported Employment Memorandum of Understanding designed to formalize the role that each agency will have in developing strategies to assist people with development disabilities in achieving competitive employment.

OPWDD is also working with OSE to educate school district and high school administrators, regional transition specialists and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) superintendents about employment options for high school students. Efforts are also underway to develop a partnership with the New York State School Boards Association to educate their membership about OPWDD services including employment.

#### 4. Transitioning Students from School to Employment

In an effort to increase the number of students who transition from high school to employment, OPWDD regional offices will partner with the State Education Department to educate families and youth about employment options. Transition aged youth who apply for OPWDD services will receive information about Pathway to Employment, Supported Employment, ACCES-VR and Commission for the Blind services. Individuals who are unable to receive ACCES-VR or Commission for the Blind services will have the option of receiving OPWDD's Pathway to Employment or supported employment services.

OPWDD will continue to utilize the Employment Training Program (ETP) as a way to partner with schools and educate stakeholders about employment while students are still in high school. There are currently 192 students participating in ETP. Components of the program include discovery and job readiness training. A customized approach is used to carve a job that matches a person's interests and skills with the needs of a business. During the internship, OPWDD pays the ETP participant a minimum wage salary (with non-Medicaid funds). Job development and job coaching supports are provided by the high school. Every ETP participant has a job description that is used to assess their progress in meeting the employer's expectations. At the end of the internship the ETP participant is hired by the business. Several businesses that have hired ETP interns have indicated that they were initially hesitate to hire a worker with developmental disabilities. The paid internship reduced risk for the business and provided an opportunity for the business to see that a person with developmental disabilities could be successful in the general workforce. OPWDD has used the paid internship program to partner with several high schools and BOCES.

Approximately 67% of the high school students that participate in ETP are working after leaving high school. ETP has created opportunities for OPWDD to get into high schools and connect with educators and families prior to OPWDD's Front Door Process. Very often teachers and families are not aware of OPWDD services. ETP triggers discussions about

the OPWDD eligibility process before students leave high school. This has resulted in a smoother transition for families.

OPWDD will also utilize its collaboration with the State Education Department on the Partnership in Employment Systems Change grant as a way to educate stakeholders about supported employment options for people with developmental disabilities. This will include information about the impact of employment on benefits, the availability of job coaching supports, access to wrap around supports and reliable transportation. Medicaid Service Coordinators will also be utilized as partners in educating students and families about supported employment services.

## 5. Improve Job Retention

In addition to increasing the number of new people receiving supported employment services, OPWDD will also focus on strategies that assist individuals in the retention of jobs. On an annual basis approximately 1,000 people transition from ACCES-VR intensive supported employment services to OPWDD extended supported employment services. Approximately 800-900 people lose those jobs becoming un-enrolled in supported employment services, resulting in annual supported employment growth of 2%-3%. This accounts for the lack of historical growth in the number of people with developmental disabilities who are engaged in competitive employment.

Data from OPWDD's Employment Training Program provides information on the following factors that contribute to job loss:

- Inability to Master Job Skills-18%
- No Longer Want to Work- 16%
- Behavior Challenges- 15%
- Lack of Transportation- 13%
- Financial Disincentive-12%
- Layoff-8%
- Dissatisfaction with Job 8%
- Medical Needs-2%
- Other-8%

OPWDD contends that several of the factors contributing to job loss could be addressed by improving the quality of job development and coaching supports, including better discovery and matching of an individual's skills and interests with an employer's needs and by providing more appropriate levels of on the job supports. OPWDD is developing strategies to improve job retention for individuals receiving supported employment services. It will take approximately 12 months to fully implement the following strategies:

- Pathway to Employment

The new Pathway to Employment service is designed to focus on discovery and pre-employment skill building which will ensure that better job development is done. The quality of supported employment services will be improved as a result of better job matches. This will ensure that individuals who are employed have the skills and supports they need to obtain employment which will result in improved retention. The Pathway to Employment service will be available by the summer of 2014.

- Incentivize Employment

The current billing and fee structure for supported employment is not comparable to the billing and fee structure for day habilitation, workshop or prevocational services. This has created a financial disincentive for providers where many voluntary agencies provide supported employment services at a financial loss.

OPWDD will work with the Department of Health to create a new supported employment billing and fee structure that is more reflected of the true cost associated with helping an individual retain employment. The new structure will be more in line with fees for other day services, creating an incentive for providers to assist individuals in transitioning from day services to employment. Beginning in October 2013, OPWDD had begun to conduct a review of supported employment providers to identify the rates, billing cycle and level of supports needed to successfully assist individuals in maintaining employment. Components of the new supported employment fee and billing structure will include performance measures, distinct funding levels for job development, job coaching and job retention, and funding for transportation cost. It is anticipated that a new supported employment fee will be available in 2015.

- Provider Training and Performance Monitoring

Many of the factors contributing to job loss indicate that the quality of supported employment services must be improved to ensure that appropriate discovery, job carving/job development and job coaching are provided by voluntary agencies. While OPWDD has trained over 2,000 staff of provider agencies in the areas of assessment, planning, job development and job coaching, the turnover of provider agency staff is such that ongoing provider training is necessary. OPWDD will continue to offer the Innovations in Employment Training Series to providers of supported employment, day habilitation, prevocational and workshop services. In addition, mandatory voluntary and state operated provider training will be a requirement before Pathway to Employment services can be provided. OPWDD is

also in discussions with ACCES-VR to align the supported employment training of both agencies to ensure that similar expectations of success are reinforced.

In addition to training it is also important that adequate supervision is provided to front-line supported employment staff. To ensure that supported employment agency supervisors are providing guidance and direction to front line staff and are monitoring their employment outcomes, OPWDD will be convening regular provider meetings by region to discuss retention, the reasons for job lost and promising practices that can be used to improve outcomes. In-person meetings will be supplemented with provider agency specific calls focused on their employment data. Effective December 2014, OPWDD will release an annual report on its website on provider supported employment outcomes with data by provider on:

- The number of people receiving supported employment services;
  - The number of people engaged in competitive employment;
  - The number of people who are not working; and
  - The number of people who have lost jobs in the last 12 months.
- Improved Data Collection

In 1993 an interagency agreement was established between OPWDD, ACCES-VR, Office of Mental Health (OMH) and Commission on the Blind regarding supported employment where OMH was designated as the agency that would collect supported employment data. In order to create and implement strategies that improve employment outcomes for people receiving SEMP services, OPWDD has begun to collect its own employment data. Discussions are ongoing between OPWDD, ACCES-VR and OMH about future partnerships to collect data.

In May 2013, OPWDD began to collect data on the number of people with developmental disabilities receiving supported employment services, number of individuals that are employed, their salary, the employment setting (integrated or segregated) and employment start date. This data was used to establish the March 31, 2013 baseline. In August 2013, providers were required to submit monthly reports on the number of people on their supported employment roster, whether those individuals are employed, whether the employment setting is integrated or segregated, the type of employment placement (individual or enclave) and employment start date. For purposes of the data collection, a segregated setting is defined as a work setting where workers with developmental disabilities and/or mental illness only interact with, and work alongside, other workers with disabilities. The data that is now being collected from supported employment providers contains better information about the following:

- Retention by provider and region of the state;
- Reason for job lost; and
- The amount of time a person is unemployed

This data will be used to work with provider agencies to create additional strategies to improve retention. OPWDD will be having ongoing dialogue with provider agencies about data including ways to improve the accuracy, integrity and collection of data and ways to address lags in the reporting of data. This will improve OPWDD’s ability to track successful employment outcomes, retention rates and the overall quality of supported employment services.

### **III. Transitioning People from Workshops to Competitive Employment and/or Other Meaningful Community Activities.**

The main components of OPWDD’s workshop transformation are strategies for workshop participants to transition to competitive employment, retirement or other community inclusion options. OPWDD will also work with provider agencies interested in creating community business that are consistent with HCBS waiver standards related to “community settings”.

The current demographics of workshop participants are as follows:

<b>Age</b>	<b>Workshop Enrollment</b>
18-33	1737
34-43	1544
44-50	1542
51-58	1671
59-96	1526
<b>Total</b>	<b>8020</b>

#### 1. Assisting Workshop Participants in Transitioning to Competitive Employment

A multi-year strategy will be needed to educate workshop participants about competitive employment options, identify individuals who are interested in competitive employment and begin a person-centered discovery and planning process to identify the supports and services that will assist them in becoming employed. OPWDD estimates that 50% of workshop participants could successfully transition to competitive employment over six years. Pathway to Employment will be utilized to assist in the person-centered discovery and planning process. OPWDD regional offices will work with providers to engage workshop participants in the following transition activities:

- Discovery, Assessment and Transition Planning

Pathway to Employment services will be offered to all workshop participants to assist in their exploration of competitive employment options. Discovery and assessment will focus on both the individual and their environment. This process will be used to identify supports and services that will assist an individual in obtaining competitive employment. Since a variety of discovery, assessment and transition planning tools already exists, OPWDD will not require the use of a specific tool but providers will be required to cover a minimum of the following:

- An assessment of the individual- soft skills (social behavior, ability to handle stress, willingness to work with others, etc), job performance (attendance, punctuality, hygiene/grooming, etc), communication skills, work ethic (motivation, initiative, focus, etc), interest (likes, wants, dislikes, dreams, etc).
  - An assessment of the individual's situation: transportation needs, family supports, physical and mental health, safety, etc.
  - Opportunities for individuals to discover different community experiences to obtain information that will be use to create a person-centered transition plan.
  - Transition plans will include both work and non work activities that create opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful activities.
  - Transition plans will include activities and options that allow individuals to maintain social networks and friendship established in the workshops.
  - Families and/or an individual's circle of support will be included in discovery, assessment and the transition planning process.
- Family Engagement  
Families will be actively involved in the discovery, assessment and planning process for workshop participants who will be transitioning to competitive employment. Families will also receive information about the impact of working on benefits, how their loved one will travel to and from work; what other meaningful community activities their loved one will be engaged in when they are not working; how job coaching supports will be provided; what happens if their loved one loses their job; and the type of supports that will be provided to help their loved one obtain new employment.
  - Staff Training  
Workshop staff will be trained on how to perform the discovery, assessment and person-centered planning necessary to assist individuals in transitioning from workshops to supported employment. OPWDD's Innovations in Employment Training and the Pathway to Employment curriculum yet to be development will be utilized as ways to retrain staff. OPWDD will also encourage providers to create opportunities for workshop staff to work as a team with their supported employment staff.



- **Peer Mentoring**  
OPWDD will partner with providers, independent living centers and self advocates to identify peer mentors who have successfully transitioned from workshop services to competitive employment. Peer mentors will share success stories with families and workshop participants and encourage them to try competitive employment options.
- **Self Direction**  
Self direction will be explored as a way to assist in the transition to competitive employment. Some individuals may be interested in the flexibility of self directing their own job development and/or coaching staff.
- **Self Employment**  
As part of the assessment and transition planning process self employment will be included as a possible career choice. Self employment could be funded by ACCES-VR or Commission for the Blind, or as part of Pathway to Employment or Supported Employment.

## 2. Workshop Transition

While there are 113 workshops currently in New York, several providers have already had success transitioning individuals from workshops to competitive employment through a combination of individual and group job placements in the community businesses and businesses owned and operated by voluntary agencies. OPWDD's central office will work with workshop providers interested in restructuring their business model to create businesses in the larger community that create opportunities for workshop participants to engage in competitive employment. As plans are developed to create community businesses, OPWDD will work with providers to ensure that these businesses meet the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver definition of community settings. Provider owned and operated community business will complement not replace individual and group job placements within private sector businesses. This strategy is being utilized to ensure that workshop participants have opportunities to choose from a variety of competitive employment options.

OPWDD's central office will convene a Workshop Transition Workgroup comprised of provider agencies that have had success transitioning individuals from workshops to either individual or group employment and universities within New York State that have done extensive research on the outcomes and criteria for successful workshop conversion. The Workshop Transition Workgroup will make recommendations to OPWDD regarding the type of technical assistance and support that will be needed to encourage and incentivize workshop transition in ways that are consistent with the

HCBS Waiver definition of community settings. The goal of workshop transition will be to establish models of competitive employment for individuals who participate in a person-centered planning process where they are made aware of all of their employment options.

### 3. Options for People Who Will Not Be Transitioning to Competitive Employment

While all workshop participants will be educated about competitive employment options, OPWDD estimates that 50% of individuals and families will not be interested in transitioning to competitive employment, have medical, adaptive or behavior support needs that create barriers to employment, or are ready to retire. Alternative options for these individuals include: Community Habilitation, Self Direction, or Day Habilitation.

### 4. Partnerships with the Business Community

In an effort to increase job opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities, OPWDD will continue to foster partnerships with the New York State Department of Labor and Empire State Development Corporation.

Collaboration with the Department of Labor is focused on improving interaction between OPWDD regional offices, supported employment providers and Department of Labor One Stop Centers, which can provide benefit counseling and job matching services to job seekers, and supported employment agencies. Collaboration with the Empire State Development Corporation is focused on educating businesses about the employment potential of people with developmental disabilities and encouraging businesses to hire more people with developmental disabilities.

### 5. Technical Assistance for New York State

In an effort to further improve competitive employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities, New York joined the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). SELN is a cross-state cooperative venture of state MR/DD agencies that are committed to improving employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities. The SELN helps states enhance their capacity to develop, implement, and support effective integrated employment initiatives designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities.

SELN will provide the following technical assistance to New York:

- Administer a self-assessment process designed by NASDDDS and Institute on Community Inclusion (ICI) project staff to identify the strengths and weaknesses of

New York's existing employment support infrastructures and develop related system improvement strategies.

- Conduct on-site visits to review/discuss New York's self-assessment and desired future, resulting in two site visit reports prepared by members of the SELN project team. These reports (a) outline the team's principal findings and observations and (b) provide a brief overview of the state's DD service delivery system and policy making environment.
- Receive assistance in developing a state Employment Work plan that lays out short-term objectives and action steps aimed at placing the state on a pathway to achieving its near-term system improvement goals. This plan identifies the types of outside assistance that may be required.
- Receive access to a pool of peer-to-peer consultants and trainers drawn both from Network states and external sources developed by ICI and NASDDDS.
- Receive assistance, if necessary, from ICI in developing a data tracking system that will help the state monitor its progress and fine-tune system improvement strategies over time.
- Receive assistance in identifying and selecting outside consultants to help the state to translate desired changes in employment policies and practices into specific operational strategies.
- Participation in monthly Network steering committee calls to manage project business and also share experiences among the participating states.

#### **IV. Summary**

This Employment Transformation Plan describes New York's commitment to improving competitive employment outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. The plan outlines strategies that: address systemic barriers to employment growth, improve cross system collaboration, and create opportunities for workshop participants to transition to competitive employment or other meaningful community activities.



## **Stakeholder Feedback on Employment Transformation Plan September 2013**

As part of the process of creating the Employment Transformation Plan, OPWDD convened an Employment Committee comprised of parents, self-advocates and providers and Community Dialogues were also convened across the state to solicit feedback from parents, self-advocates and providers. Both of these activities gave OPWDD the opportunity to share information and solicit feedback from stakeholders. This feedback was taken into consideration as the Employment Transformation Plan was drafted and has been included as an Appendix to the plan. Not all of these stakeholder suggestions were incorporated into the Employment Plan, however the dialogue was extremely important and assisted OPWDD in identifying stakeholder concerns that will need to be addressed as the Employment Plan is implemented. OPWDD will continue to engage in ongoing communication and dialogue with stakeholders as the Employment Transformation Plan is finalized and implemented. Stakeholder feedback was as follows:

### Feedback from Employment Committee

The committee agreed to make the following recommendations to OPWDD as it relates to its creation of an Employment Transformation Plan:

1. Strategies to Improve Employment Outcomes
  - a. There needs to be greater collaboration between ACCES-VR and OPWDD. State agencies should work together to better align and streamline their eligibility processes.
  - b. Opportunities must be created for supported employment providers to partner with schools and start working with students and families prior to graduation to better support the transition to adult services and community employment outcomes.
  - c. Opportunities must exist with ACCES-VR and OPWDD to fund supports for summer and afterschool employment.
  - d. More information must be available to students and families about the impact of employment on their benefits and how work incentives can be utilized.
  - e. The State should build on the success of the Model Transition Program (MTP) previously funded by ACCES-VR.
  - f. OPWDD should expand the Employment Training Program (ETP) which will increase partnership with schools and increase the number of students who transition to employment upon leaving high school.
  - g. The State should increase business incentives to encourage the employment of people with developmental disabilities.
  - h. A new flexible and tiered supported employment fee structure is need that is more in-line with the true cost associated with assisting someone in achieving their employment goals. Flexibility must be built into the fee structure that would allow



voluntary agencies to provide supports that are efficiently and effectively tailored to the changing support needs of each person.

- i. If needed, transportation should be included in supported employment fees.

## 2. Strategies related to Workshop Transformation

- a. Since the policy decision was made to end new enrollments into workshops effective July 1, 2013, consideration should be given to allow for the natural attrition of workshop participants especially since 40% of workshop participants are over the age of 50.
- b. For the remain 60% of workshop participants annual goals in the range of five to ten percent a year should be identified to transition people out of workshops to competitive employment.
- c. Consideration should be given to the large number of people who are currently employed in workshops and the time it will take to engage in the discovery and transition planning needed to assist them in the transition to either competitive employment or other meaningful community activities, therefore OPWDD funding for workshops should phase out over 9-11 years. This timeline is in line with what has been done in other states.
- d. Given the concerns of families and the feedback received from the Community Dialogues the elimination of funding for workshops should be reconsidered. Workshops should continue to be an option for individuals who are retirement age but want to continue to work or have medical, behavior or other support needs that create employment barriers. Workshops should also be viewed as a safety net for people who lose their jobs.
- e. As people transition from workshops to competitive employment funding must be available for providers to address their property costs.
- f. Supported Employment must be restructured to fund the supports people will need as they transition to competitive employment. Job coaching supports must be available whether a person needs one-on-one or lifelong coaching supports.
- g. Options must be available for people who lose employment that allow them to become engaged in the discovery process to find new employment.
- h. Data systems should be created to track workshop transformation, including the number of people who transition to competitive employment, the number of hours per week they are employed, the number of support hours they receive, what happens to people who are not working and the how satisfied individuals and families are with the their post workshop options.
- i. As people transition to competitive employment attention must be paid to case management which will be essential in assisting individuals and families navigate employment and community inclusion options.



- j. Technical assistance and financial support must be available to voluntary agencies with large physical plant infrastructures, mortgages or equipment obligations. Assistance will be needed in finding alternative usages for properties. Technical assistance will also be needed to retrain staff and upgrade their skill set so they are successful in assisting individuals in the transition to competitive employment.
  - k. The business community should be engaged in discussions about ways to increase the employability of people who will be transitioning from workshops.
3. Discovery, Assessment and Transition Planning
- a. Discovery is an essential part of the process of transitioning people to competitive employment. It will provide baseline information on a person's skills, abilities, interests, etc. This information should be used to establish benchmarks related to what a person needs in order to successfully transition to employment or other meaningful community activities.
  - b. Discovery should be a process that is used to learn about the individual and their unique needs. From the individual perspective there should be a review of soft skills including: social behaviors, job performance and work ethic. An individual's situation should also be assessed and include a review of their transportation needs, family supports, social relationships, mental and physical health and the impact that work will have on their lives.
  - c. There should be opportunities for periodic reassessment and reevaluation of a person's progress and continuing needs.
  - d. The discovery process should be used to create individualized employment plans.
  - e. The transition process should include opportunities for people to engage in integrated work sampling, work try outs, internships, situational worksite assessment, job sharing, etc.
  - f. A staff team approach should be utilized to engage in the discovery, assessment and transition planning process. Training opportunities must be available for workshop staff and to the extent possible they should have opportunities to work with supported employment staff as individuals transition to competitive employment. A person's circle of support must be included in the discovery, assessment and transition process.
  - g. There must be a recognition that additional funding will be needed due to increased staffing supports that will be needed to assist people in the transition to competitive employment.
  - h. Mechanisms must be in place for post job placement follow up which will enable providers to assess how satisfied people are both mentally and physically with competitive employment. It will also be important to create ways for social networks that have been created in workshops to stay connected.



- i. Ongoing supports must be available to address any barriers or concerns that arise after job placement including fears, isolation, transportation difficulties, benefits problems, health and safety, etc.
  - j. Benefits counseling should be available families.
  - k. The Social Security Administration should be encouraged to incentive employment by allowing people to earn income without immediate reductions to their monthly benefits.
4. Volunteerism as the Bridge to Employment
- a. Volunteering should be used as part of the discovery process and transition planning process as an opportunity to work on soft skills and identify interests.
  - b. The provision of volunteerism as a bridge to community inclusion creates an opportunity for workshop staff to upgrade their skill set to better align with community-based support options.
  - c. Volunteerism may also create opportunities to address family concerns and fears related to the transition to competitive employment.

#### Feedback from Community Dialogues

The following is a summary of stakeholder feedback from the eight Community Dialogues convened between September 16 and 26:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 financial incentives should be available to encourage providers to change their business model which will create jobs in integrated settings.
- 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 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.
- 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 whether businesses are willing to hire people with disabilities.
- Questions were raised about the willingness of community members to accept people with disabilities.
- 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 that people will either attend day habilitation or stay home if workshops are closed.
- 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 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Concerns were raised about the future of staff employed at workshops.