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# DDS Executive Briefs

## *An Update on CT DDS Initiatives*

February 2020

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### **Message from the Commissioner**

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Dear Friends,

I want to begin this Executive Brief by wishing everyone a happy and healthy 2020! A new year allows for reflection over the past year and an opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments while also identifying ways to improve. DDS has entered the new decade with lots of important work to do to maintain excellence and continue to improve the quality of the supports that we offer.

One of my personal goals for the new year is to celebrate and honor the many unique voices within our system. I want to take some time here to recognize the individuals we support, their families, advocates, private providers and the DDS staff for their tireless efforts in working to make our system better. Each of your voices matters and has a place in our agency and the continued development of our services. I want to continue to hear your opinions and perspectives. Your dedication allows me to understand the work of our agency better and motivates me to lead the agency toward continuous improvement.

This goal extends to many facets of the department's work. As one example, DDS is continuing our work on diversity, equity and inclusion. Our newly re-energized Diversity Steering Committee is meeting regularly and finalizing the specific plans that we will implement this year. I plan to provide regular staff updates on the work of the committee and how the group can receive feedback and suggestions. We hope to hear from our staff, individuals and families, and other stakeholders on how we can continue to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, including culturally competent services.

We expect that this work will allow for an opportunity to rediscover how each of our unique backgrounds can enhance the great work of our agency. Diversity, equity and inclusion is a priority for our agency and I truly believe embracing these efforts can lead to positive changes in how our staff work together and with the individuals and families we support.

Please enjoy the many exciting initiatives highlighted throughout this brief! As always, I extend my gratitude to everyone involved.

With best wishes for the year ahead,

Jordan

## 2020 Connecticut Legislative Session

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The 2020 legislative session of the Connecticut General Assembly kicked off on Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>. This is a short session, scheduled to end on Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. As with most sessions, DDS is anticipating a busy yet successful next few months.

To follow bills the department is tracking or to read the department's testimony on legislation, please visit the [DDS legislative affairs webpage](#).

In addition, if you would like to receive DDS legislative email updates please email [DDS Legislative Affairs](#) to sign up. Legislative updates will contain information on pending legislation, committee meetings, public hearings and legislative sessions of interest to DDS and its stakeholders.

## Housing Updates

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### IDASH Program- Visiting the Canton Location



In partnership with the Department of Housing (DOH), the Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder Housing (IDASH) program continues to support and grow community-based settings within the state. Specifically, the program funds the development of supportive housing units by requiring property developers to partner with qualified providers to develop proposals for innovative, integrated and affordable housing. The program also focuses on locations that are transit-oriented and close to local work opportunities, while fostering independence by utilizing smart home technology.

DDS recently visited the IDASH development in Canton, scheduled to open in Spring of 2020. In collaboration with Regan Development Corporation and DDS provider FAVARH, the complex will provide 10 apartments to 21 individuals with intellectual disability. Accounting for 25% of the units in the complex, individuals with intellectual disability will have the opportunity to live in an integrated setting while utilizing assistive technology and the natural supports of the complex to achieve a successful living environment that provides an opportunity to fully participate as valued members in their community.



Developer Ken Regan detailed that each unit will be fully accessible and will include additional assistive technology enhancements that provide safety measures while supporting independence. As the enhancements to each unit were based on the specific needs of each identified tenant, the units have been furnished to include technology such as environmentally controlled lights and shades, cook top sensors, automatic doors and mattress remotes to monitor sleep. In person staff support from FAVARH will also be available within the complex, while wall mounted iPad systems are also being installed into the units to provide an option for tenants to connect to staff virtually.



Additional community activities will be provided in and around the complex. FAVARH also plans to provide cooking classes that allow interested individuals to learn cooking skills but also prepare and store food for future meals.

Thank you to all the partners that are helping make the Canton IDASH development a supportive, safe and integrated home for the individuals with intellectual disability.

From left to right: Nathan Karnes, Department of Housing; Steve DiLella, Department of Housing; Christina Gellman, Office of Fiscal Analysis; Kevin Witkos, State Senator of the 8<sup>th</sup>

District; Stephen Morris, FAVARH Executive Director; Ken Reagan, Vice President of Reagan Development Corporation; Josh Scalora, DDS.

### **Moving into My Own Apartment- Simon's Story**

Simon was recently selected to move into his own apartment as part of the IDASH affordable housing program. Here is a note Simon sent to the department about the process:



I am so excited to be moving out of my house this year. I know my mom and dad will miss me but I will come visit them and they will take a turn visiting me also. I have wanted to move into my own apartment since 2010 as one of my goals. I am so happy to move into my own apartment with my best friend Chris who I knew since elementary school and we like to sleep over each other's houses almost every weekend, so we like to have fun together doing different things together. When I move into my own apartment it will be a big responsibility like my responsibilities will be washing the dishes, cleaning the counter, vacuuming my apartment and other things I need to do also. The good things about living in a apartment is I will be living with a friend, I will be just like my brother and sister, I could make up my own rules not depending on my mom and dad's rules any more. I am so proud of myself to have reached that goal and so is everyone else.

*Pictured above is Chris & Simon*

Congratulations, Simon. We cannot wait to hear about your experiences in your new home!

## **Employment Updates**

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### **Customized Employment**

As many are aware, the department has been working on finalizing the roll out of Customized Employment. We are excited about this work and know it will have a positive impact on supporting those individuals who have historically experienced barriers to employment.

Currently, DDS has placed customized employment services in all three DDS waivers with detail on the four levels of support: Discovery, Job Search/Placement, Job Development, and Post Employment Supports.

Customized Employment is a process through which the relationship between employer and employee is negotiated and personalized in a way that meets the needs of both parties in a typical workplace environment. Wages are at least minimum wage and comparable to other employees performing the same tasks. Employers are required to offer employees with disabilities the same benefits and opportunities as all other employees in that same position including interactions with other employees, customers and vendors.

Customized employment may also include modifications to an employee's work environment, changes to certain job functions that help an employee successfully perform them, and adjustments to employment policies or practices that support the employee.

The department is actively engaged in provider recruitment, finalizing the certification curriculum and standardizing the rates with the Department of Aging and Disability Services.

For more information on this service please contact Amber Burke at [Amber.Burke@ct.gov](mailto:Amber.Burke@ct.gov).

### **Intellectual Disability Partnership Innovative Employment Outcomes Pilot- Where are They Now?**

In 2019, DDS and the Intellectual Disability Partnership Advisory Council announced the awardees selected to participate in the Intellectual Disability Partnership Innovative Employment Outcomes Pilot. Interested entities were asked to submit business plans for an innovative or alternative business model that employs or encourages the employment of individuals with intellectual disability. The pilot focuses on providing support and resources to ensure the success of new or expanding business ventures that integrate individuals with intellectual disability. The department hopes these business models will also provide a framework for other entities interested in similar work.

As we reach the six-month mark awardees have had an opportunity to learn through the process and experience many important successes. Below are updates on the seven individual and family awardees:

**Edeline Gives Glory to God Stress-balls (EGGGS)** was awarded funding to expand an existing business that sells specialized stress balls. The business has used some of the funding for web design and to purchase materials to make the product. The business also participated in two public events. In all, EGGGS recorded an impressive net profit in December. Future business plans for EGGGS include attending the One Voice Conference, which focuses on inclusive health initiatives for individuals with intellectual disability and seeking mentorship around entrepreneurial growth with SCORE.



**Our Gathering Place** was awarded funding for a start-up café that serves breakfast, lunch and “grab and go” meals. Initially, the business planned to open a location in Bristol. However, the location did not materialize, and they continue to look for a new site. The business plans to work with SCORE to consult on business startup.



**Love Lera** was awarded funding for a start-up bakery. Initially, the business had a specific location in mind, located in proximity to the university of New Haven. Unfortunately, the business was unable to secure this location for the bakery. The business continues to look for a store front and reported it is considering locations in North Haven. The owner has expressed interest in working with SCORE to aid in addressing barriers to the business opening. DDS will continue to assist Love Lera with connecting to business consultants.

**Westport Book Sales** was awarded funding for a partnership with the Town of Westport’s Commission on Disabilities’ CAPE Committee to conduct a full book sale operation at the Westport Library. A key part of the business mission of the reimagined book sale is to provide meaningful volunteer and paid employment opportunities for adults with disabilities. The business has utilized funds for promotional bookmarks and equipment fees. The business has played a role in past Westport Library book sales and are on target to take over complete control of future book sales, tentatively starting March of 2020. Over the past six months an agreement between the business owner and the Library has also been executed, which designates space in the library to run the everyday business operations.

**Woofgang and Co.** was awarded funding to further develop a pre-existing business that makes homemade dog biscuits and baking supplies. The business has reported that the awarded funds have been utilized to purchase baking material, ingredients, and materials for the blankets. Woofgang and Co. has a partnership agreement with the Bigelow Center for Seniors, which includes retail space in Fairfield. The company also has an email distribution list of over 1,000 recipients and is actively working to expand their network. Woofgang will participate as a vendor at the One Voice Conference in March 2020, where the business will be showcased.



**Westport Cinema** was awarded funding to develop a new business venture in a cinema that will focus on the employment of individuals with developmental disabilities at competitive wages. The program has been active in developing ties to the community, including a presence with the Westport City Hall. To date, the business is still seeking a location for the cinema and continues to focus on key locations in Westport. Funds have been accessed for website construction, marketing materials, merchandizing, and a popcorn cart, that has employed two individuals and has been used to create a presence in downtown Westport.



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**DJ Joe** was awarded funding to further develop his existing business. DDS contact with the business has indicated that DJ Joe has shown a recent increase in jobs including events New York City and Pennsylvania. DJ Joe will be showcased at the Tim Tebow Night to Shine event. Additionally, DJ Joe will participate as a vendor in the upcoming One Voice Conference. The business plans to make significant equipment purchases to further expand and develop the business.

Congratulations to all the successful business ventures! DDS is excited to support and share your continued growth and accomplishments!

## Medicaid Operations Updates

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### Overview of DDS Medicaid Waivers

#### Comprehensive Supports Waiver

This waiver provides services to individuals who reside in licensed residential settings, or who reside in a personal home and require a comprehensive array of services. This waiver offers a broad range of supports, so that individuals with more complex behavioral health or medical needs may choose a personalized package of supports necessary to remain in their own or their family's home. This waiver includes traditional service-delivery and participant-directed options, including employer of record and agency with choice models.

*Annual waiver cap per person: 150% of the average institutionalized cost of care*

#### Individual and Family Support Waiver

This waiver is designed to provide supports that allow individuals to continue to live safe and productive lives in a family home or their own home. The waiver also encourages consumer-direction to maximize choice.

*Annual waiver cap per person: \$130,000*

#### Employment and Day Supports Waiver

This waiver provides supports for individuals over the age of 18 who require career development, supported employment or community-based day supports, respite, or behavioral supports to remain in their own or their family home. This waiver also may be used by children under the age of 21 with complex medical needs who would otherwise require institutional placement.

*Annual waiver cap per person: \$58,000*

### DDS Medicaid Waiver Amendments

DDS is pleased to announce that the following waiver amendments have been approved by the Connecticut Legislature and the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) effective January 1, 2020:

- Adding **Remote Supports** as a service to all waivers. This service will promote independent living through an off-site, direct service provider who will monitor and respond to a person's health and safety needs by utilizing real-time, two-way communication. This service also may include assistance from a local provider who will provide backup staffing in cases where direct assistance may be needed.
- **Increasing the Assistive Technology limit** per waiver participant from \$5,000 to \$15,000 over a five-year period and adding an assistive technology support cost to the Assistive Technology service array on all waivers. These changes will enhance and improve functional capabilities for waiver participants.
- Adding **Vehicle Modification** as a waiver service to the Employment and Day Supports waiver and increasing the Vehicle Modification limit per waiver participant from \$10,000 to \$15,000 over the term of each of the three waivers. Vehicle modifications allow participants to make necessary alterations to their vehicle to promote independence and community inclusion.

- Adding **Environmental Modification** as a waiver service to the Employment and Day Supports waiver and increasing the Environmental Modification limit per waiver participant from \$15,000 to \$25,000 over the term of each of the three waivers. Environmental Modifications allow participants to make physical adaptations to their private residence to ensure the health and safety of the individual while promoting greater independence in the home.
- Adding **Personal Emergency Response system** as a service to the Employment and Day Supports waiver. This service will promote general safety and provides an emergency alert option for waiver participants.