



Supporting
Transformation
to Empower
People



No Tricks, Just Treats

DDS STEP Fall Newsletter

DDS
portal.ct.gov/dds

DDS Stakeholders,

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is committed to keeping all stakeholders informed of the ongoing work we are doing to advance the agency's mission and vision through upcoming DDS community forums in October.



I invite you to join Deputy Commissioner Elisa Velardo and me for a series of annual update community forums to be held in October. These virtual forums will be hosted across two days at four different times to accommodate everyone's busy schedules. Each forum will have the same format and agenda. Please see the schedule for these forums below. If you can't attend, don't worry, everything will be recorded and available on the DDS website for viewing at your convenience.

Thank you for attending our previous STEP forums in May and connecting with your case managers and support teams to learn more about STEP. Your opinions and feedback are what matter most in how we shape our agency's path forward. I hope you'll join the upcoming October forums to connect with leadership from DDS and the Regional offices to ask questions, share your concerns, and offer feedback.

I encourage all individuals eligible for DDS services and their families to take the next STEP and start talking with their provider staff and case managers about STEP's core supports for promoting and enhancing independence. Any changes to your current supports will be made carefully in a person-centered manner, with team discussion, agreement and with a detailed transition plan.

STEP's core support options:

- Self-Direction
- Community Companion Home (CCH)
- Supportive Housing
- Individualized Home Support (IHS)
- Assistive Technology
- Remote Support
- Employment



During the October forums and throughout the remainder of the year, I look forward to sharing more news and details about the important work we are doing to help all individuals and families supported by DDS have greater independence, freedom of choice, and more opportunities to be valued members of their communities.

Sincerely,

Jordan A. Scheff, DDS Commissioner

STEPing into Texting

More people today communicate via text. In our continued efforts to keep you updated, DDS will soon be able to send quarterly text updates to people who sign up to receive texts. DDS texts will come from the number 88911, and our texts will NEVER ask you for your personal information over text or by calling a phone number.

If you want to receive the latest updates from DDS, please sign up for texts on the DDS website at bit.ly/DDStexts or **scan this QR code.** ▶



Exciting News: More Independence for Individuals with Disabilities



We have some great news from the legislative side of things at DDS! Thanks to the hard work of Governor Lamont, the Legislature, and advocates, Public Act 23-137 (House Bill 5001) was passed this year.

This bill is all about creating more opportunities for people with intellectual disability to have greater independence. We're already doing important work with our STEP initiative, and this new bill complements it perfectly. To learn more about the bill and its impact, visit ct.gov/STEP. Together, we're continuing to make positive changes for individuals with I/DD.

New STEP Website!

We want to make information about STEP easily available to you. We've created a STEP webpage, ct.gov/STEP, which is updated regularly with information, videos, and events. The STEP page will allow people to read, see, and hear about different support options to help you or your loved one lead a more independent life.



◀ Scan the QR code or go to ct.gov/STEP to visit the STEP website.
Disponible en español con el código QR.

AT and Me

A new program named “AT and Me” is available to people who receive supports from DDS. This program teaches people how to use assistive technology (AT) for daily tasks through a unique “Peer to Peer” training approach, where participants learn from and teach each other. To participate, you must be able to use the AT and Me backpack technology and train two others. Approved applicants get free AT equipment like a cell phone, laptop, internet hotspot, and wireless headphones. Contact your Case Manager to apply to the AT and Me program.



Coming Attractions!!

The summer blockbuster season might be over, but DDS is just heating up with our STEP video series! Starting this month, we introduce a series of short videos about the seven core STEP supports. Each video features individuals, family members, support staff, and DDS experts discussing the impact the support has had on their lives. Some videos will also feature demonstrations of the supports and will candidly address families’ challenges and concerns when their loved ones transitioned to supports that offered more independence. It’s not always easy to picture you or your loved one living more independently, but we hope these stories of real individuals successfully using DDS supports to live the life they want helps you to see the possibilities! Stay tuned to ct.gov/STEP, email updates, and social media for the premiere of each video!



STEPS to Independence

Through STEP, people who receive DDS supports are finding more independence and loving their changes! DDS approved STEP Transition Plans in every region of the state. Providers wrote the plans to say how they will support individuals to live and work as independently as possible in their communities. Some people already changed where they live or started new jobs! These stories are based on real plans:

Where people live

John was living in a group home, but he wanted to move into a more independent setting with more privacy. Through STEP, he moved to his own apartment with supports! Before he moved, he talked with his provider and support team about the things that were important for him to have in his new home—he really wanted a dishwasher and to be able to walk to a grocery store. He didn't want to have a roommate. Before John moved, he took classes to help him learn how to make his own food, so he felt ready for his new apartment.

He loves living in his own apartment! He really enjoys having more independence and the ability to choose what he does during the day. He still gets the supports he needs, especially for remembering when to take his medicine and with helping him to keep track of his money and budget and improve social skills. His apartment has safety stops on the stove to keep him safe. He also talks with his provider to make sure the transition is going well.

Eight provider plans focus on where people live.

How people work

Shanique was working at a group site. She liked working with her friends but didn't like the work she was doing. Her provider had a meeting where Shanique talked to people with individual jobs and learned what it would be like. She also met with her provider and her support team to talk about her goals and what an individual job might be like.

Shanique decided to get a new job. To help get ready, she followed someone at their job to see what their day was like. She worked with her provider to apply for positions she was interested in. They also worked together to set goals and plan for taking the bus to her new job.

She started her new job at a clothing store and loves meeting new people! Shanique feels comfortable because she has a job coach to ask questions and help her learn. She has regular check-ins with her job coach about her job and her goals, and still gets supports from her provider when she isn't at work.

Nine provider plans focus on how people work.

Interested in the next STEP?

Talk to your case manager if you are interested in becoming more independent.

More providers will submit STEP Transition Plans this summer and fall!



STEP Fall Events



◀ Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/DDSCalendar for the DDS Calendar



STEP Regional Virtual Office Hours in September

Each Region will be holding virtual office hours on Microsoft Teams where you can ask questions, share comments, or have a general conversation about STEP. This is an opportunity to talk directly to regional leadership about STEP.

North Region:

- Wednesday, September 13 from 10:30 am–11:30 am
- Monday, September 25 from 12:00–1:00 pm

South Region:

- Wednesday, September 27 from 11:00 am–12:00 pm
- Wednesday, September 27 from 4:00–5:00 pm

West Region:

- Thursday, September 7 from 11:00 am–12:00 pm
- Thursday, September 28 from 4:00–5:00 pm



◀ Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/STEPofficehours to sign up for the Virtual Office Hours



◀ An AT and Me Event and a mobile smart home demonstration will be on display at Camp Harkness on September 16. For more info **scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/30HvysN**.

DDS October Commissioner Annual Update Community Forums

- Tuesday, October 10 from 6:00–8:00 pm
- Thursday, October 12 from 9:00–11:00 am
- Tuesday, October 17 from 6:00–8:00 pm
- Wednesday, October 18 from 9:00–11:00 am



◀ **Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/DDSOctForums** to learn more and sign up for the Forums

Fourth Tuesday Forums on Innovative Options

- September 25: Custom Individualized Home Support Opportunities
- October 23: Community Companion Home Options throughout the Lifespan
- November 28: Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment



◀ **Scan the QR code or go to ct.gov/STEP** to register and attend upcoming Fourth Tuesday Forums

DDS Needs Your Input on Transportation



Everyone in Connecticut can face transportation barriers, especially people with a disability. In 2022, DDS created a Transportation Workgroup to begin collecting information about those barriers. We would like to hear about any transportation barriers you have faced.

Please complete this brief, voluntary survey, which will be used to collect information on transportation for individuals with disabilities across the state, by scanning the QR code below with your smartphone camera.

The survey can be completed by individuals or their family member/natural supports. Questions can be sent to Employment & Day Services at **DDS.Employment-DayServices@ct.gov**.



◀ Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/TransportSurveyEnglish for survey in English



◀ Scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/TransportSurveySpanish for survey in Spanish. Disponible en español con el código QR.

Sign-up for E-Updates

We hope you have enjoyed our bi-monthly newsletter as much as we have enjoyed sharing it with you!

Just as we care about the future for you and your loved ones, DDS cares about operating in a more environmentally friendly and sustainable way to do our part to preserve that future for all. Going forward, hard copy newsletters like this one will be replaced with digital newsletters as our agency embraces a more environmentally friendly means of sharing content. This change will also allow us to move to a monthly email newsletter so information can be shared more frequently.



◀ To sign up for the DDS monthly newsletter delivered straight to your email inbox, please make sure we have your email address by signing up at portal.ct.gov/DDS/Newsletter or by scanning the QR code.

But wait, there's more! By signing up for the e-newsletter, you will receive other important information on STEP and other DDS happenings that we e-blast out to our community.

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