

December 31, 2015

To: Commissioner Murray, Department of Developmental Services
From: Diana G. Mennone, MS

Re: Call for Public Recommendations on the Future of Southbury Training School (STS)

Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my heartfelt recommendations on the future of Southbury Training School. I have had a long and close relationship with many at STS first as the sibling and legal guardian of a current resident and also as a (now retired) State School Special Education Teacher at STS for 33 years. My brother has resided at STS for 37 years. Teams of interdisciplinary staff have provided specialized services at this federally reimbursed ICF/IID (Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities). Longitudinally, they are his second family, some in various direct care and supervisory positions for decades. Even though he is profoundly challenged in a number of areas and experiencing declines in health and skill development as he ages, there is an active treatment schedule with goals and objectives, implementation of programs and quarterly reviews of progress or maintenance in a number of areas. ICF/IID certification for each person at STS requires compliance in all aspects of care in a strict set of regulations including staffing ratios, in-service training, health care services, dietetic services, physical environment, etc. which ensure a quality of care with unannounced inspection/surveys to maintain certification and federal reimbursement.

I am currently serving on a number of Boards and Councils.

- Officer (Secretary) on the Board of Directors of the Home and School Association of Southbury Training School.
- Member of the STS Board of Trustees
- Representative from the STS Board of Trustees to the Council on Developmental Services for DDS.
- Member of Governor Malloy's Southbury Training School Task Force - a special state-local task force appointed to develop a comprehensive plan on the future use of the training school campus and how to maintain the buildings and grounds as it continues to be home to residents.

Please note that I have also contributed to suggestions from the organizations listed above but I am sending these recommendations as an individual independent of those organizations.

Viewpoint & Reasoning:

STS is a unique setting populated with individual "cottages" in a beautiful and well maintained campus. The occupied residential buildings are in very good repair and there are closed buildings that with a minimum of attention could be equipped for use. The town of Southbury and STS form a special union with integrated community events enjoyed by its citizens. In the future, people could live at STS - a place designed like other assisted living environments for seniors, when family and friends can no longer provide the care they are currently giving.

Like many family members and employees of STS, I have first-hand experience of different trends over the years in caring and teaching the intellectually disabled population. The safety of a campus setting, an environment conducive to the challenges of its residents, and ICF/IID certified providers work well for the aging, vulnerable and frail folks living at, for some, the only place they have ever called home. On the spectrum-of-care options, people who are registered with DDS and/or their legal guardians should be able to make a choice on where they would like to live. STS is a necessary choice for a small percentage of the DDS population.

Recommendation #1

STS should continue to operate as an ICF/IID for the aging population of intellectually / developmentally disabled (I/DD) individuals from CT DDS. Help in shortening the DDS Waiting List.

Justification

If STS closed its doors additional community homes would be necessary for hundreds of people with very high levels of need, meaning more expensive supports than the norm. There has been a waiting list of many registered DDS consumers in Connecticut who are on the emergency or priority one list for residential placement. They should be the priority and they need assistance NOW. Being guardian for my brother, I have visited community homes per the Messier Settlement Agreement and I have yet to find the proper staffing ratio or necessary nursing coverage to meet his needs. Closing STS or moving to home and community-based waiver services (HCBS) will not save money, it will require additional funding from the State of Connecticut. Funds for the process of transitioning, finding/buying real estate, support services, ancillary staff to meet some of the most challenging people...It's common sense. An unbiased fiscal analysis and accurate cost comparison study of STS vs. moving to community placements needs to be completed to truly prove what others propose. Justification of moving a person with significant medical and/or behavioral needs is also a very risky safety issue. STS provides the necessary staff with specialized, mandatory training in lifesaving procedures as well as in-service training on individualized procedures and guidelines for communication, dining, ambulation, behavioral support, nutrition, etc.

Recommendation #2

Keep and expand use of current STS Clinics – Promote wellness for those with intellectual / developmental disabilities.

Justification

The STS Dental Clinic offers state-of-the-art dental services for STS residents and hundreds of community-based DDS clients. Finding a dentist and hygienist who is trained to serve those with special needs is a daunting experience. Dental issues can develop into bigger problems (behavioral, medical) before the underlying issue is discovered. For those in the community not lucky enough to find a dentist and dental hygienist with experience in the field of I/DD and persons with physical challenges, the STS Dental Clinic is handicapped accessible and veteran staff can offer cleanings and dental work for challenging patients.

Same justification with the Pulmonary Services and Rehabilitation Clinic - currently provides a proactive and multi-disciplinary team approach individualized for aging residents of STS.

Recommendation #3

Provide respite and / or temporary care for families of I/DD.

Justification

Giving families who care for their loved ones much needed respite or any need for temporary housing could be provided at the STS campus. Unoccupied buildings could be staffed to meet the needs of those individuals with extreme behavioral challenges or when a crisis situation occurs. Staff trained in behavioral support techniques and the ability to implement individual programs would certainly help ease the minds of family and offer routine components of care and recreational fun for the people in crisis in a beautiful rural setting.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Although the Regional Centers are not included in this request for recommendations, some of my suggestions can certainly apply to the Regional Centers in Connecticut as well.