

**From:** [David Arezzini](#)  
**To:** [Carvalho, Joseph](#)  
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My name is Lynn Arezzini. I am the mother of Karl Arezzini, a 31-year-old who has autism.

Due to the support of DDS, DSS, Chapel Haven, Marrakech and Family Care Visiting Nurse Karl is able to live in his own apartment, engage in relational activities, volunteer and work. He has a wonderful job as an artisan at East Street Arts where he canes chairs and creates beautiful art work. He performs cello and sings at Bethesda Lutheran Church and even takes line dancing with New Haven Park and Rec and swims at the JCC pool. His life was really humming along until the pandemic.

Karl thrives on routine and the pandemic blew routine out of the water. Karl has had increased anxiety and increased behavioral issues due to the many changes in staff, in-person to virtual events and a major staffing shortage particularly at his apartment. My husband, Karl's sister and I have had to cover for staff on a regular basis. Karl has regressed in many areas of independence and we and his staff are working hard to help him gain back these skills.

My recommendations for the DDS five year plan is to make allowances for changes in an individual's needs over time. Services may need to be increased as a person's disability needs change over time. Living in the community needs to fit what a person needs at any given point in time. My son's needs have become more complex and at this point he may be better served in an environment with more supervision, such as the community based congregate setting at Chapel Haven in New Haven.

There has always been a staffing shortage for the disabled, but the pandemic exacerbated this shortage. Non-profit workers need better pay and benefits so that working with people like my son becomes a career choice rather than just another low paying job without benefits.

In terms of employment for the DDS population, individuals who are verbal should explain to case managers and job coaches what they would enjoy doing for work and what concerns they may have about working.

For non-verbal individuals, parents, teachers and staff should give feedback about what interests an individual has and what holds their attention for the longest periods of time, as well as concerns they may have about that individual working.

If someone has group or supported work with sub-minimum wage which is meaningful

for them, that position should be evaluated to make sure it is not isolating or taking advantage of the disabled person. I would hate for people to lose a supported work position because of well-intentioned state rules that take away something that is giving meaning and purpose to a more severely disabled person. Also volunteer work that an individual loves and succeeds at should not be eliminated because there is no pay for that activity.

Just as individual's residential support needs change over time, there may be a need to change the type of work they engage in as well. DDS need to identify and advertise for a wide variety of work environments for a range of disabled adults. Federal dollars from the human infrastructure bill could be used to coordinate these efforts between agencies and work places.

In summary, DDS needs to be flexible in how they support and fund individuals with IDD. Training and securing quality staff should be one of the main focuses of the five year plan as well as finding the right fit for living environments, job and day programs. Transportation for job and community activities also needs to be a priority.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify and give input for the DDS five year plan.

Sincerely,

Lynn Arezzini

Dave & Lynn Arezzini  
150 Sconset Lane  
Guilford, CT 06437  
H: 203.689.5780  
Dave's C: 203.554.2339  
Lynn's C:203.249.2668

*The more you are motivated by love, the more fearless and free  
your actions will be.*

*Maharaji*