

Testimony : DDS 5 year Plan 2022-2027

Rosemary Petruzzi

January 13, 2022

Dear Commissioner Scheff, the DDS Executive Management Team, and members of the public.

My name is Rosemary Petruzzi and I have been involved with DDS and STS for the major part of my life because of my aunt, Mary Petruzzi, who has very happily spent the past 55 years at STS. She left home at the age of 21, when she became too aggressive for her elderly parents to care for.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts for the 5-Year DDS Plan. I enjoyed reviewing your draft and would like to join with you in developing a robust plan for the coming years. Especially in light of what we have endured as a community due to Covid.

I appreciate you using the various constructs developed to explain your plan. I agree, technology needs to be increasingly, and effectively implemented, in connecting us to the digital world, as well as, exploiting its greatest potentials to our best ends.

Another aspect that deserves attention is education and mentoring. Another priority due to Covid, is ongoing education and training specific to the needs of our populations, so we can cultivate and retain the best personnel in the healthcare field.

I envision an incubator. Optimally working out of the STS Roselle school and networked to anyone who is connected by internet/digitally so we can facilitate virtual classrooms and workshops. We can work on direct care training, empathy and care training, medical specialties, mental health and support for clients, caregivers and staff, support classes for families, technical support and instruction for staff, family and clients. As well as provide a hub, and forum for any other issues that may arise during this unprecedented time. A place to reliably connect, learn, create, find reliable information and voice our concerns in a time relevant manner. We would be able to form cohorts, niche advocacy groups, and share best practices, not to mention support each other in kindness.

STS has pioneered excellent healthcare and providers for the IDD population. This includes dentistry, medical, and nursing. This needs to be expanded for all IDD residents of CT and their families. Medical staff needs to be educated and sensitized to our needs, especially now. Our greatest failing is what happens when our loved ones go to the hospital now during Covid. It is in itself often a traumatizing event.

I would like to see attention given to mortality and longevity needs of our DDS populations. From the chart (pg.4), and I am not sure I am reading it correctly, after age 21, and then again at 54 and 64 years of age, the population of DDS clients falls off precipitously. I am not sure the reasons why. STS manages to care for individuals well into advanced age and I would like to see that available to all. The best possible health and well-being outcomes need to a “Right” for all residents and families.

As you well know, mortality increases in our population due to significant life changes and lack of consistency in supports. This extends to relationships, family, living conditions, residences, medications, medical care, environments, care staff etc... This must not be dismissed at this time of incredible and often unforeseen change. We must buffer them, as best we can from these potentially life threatening offenses, and of course the threat of Covid. I am generally pleased with how the staff and administration has responded to date to our Covid epidemic and subsequent variations. It is admittedly overwhelming due to the constraints of testing, staffing, and compliance. Hopefully, we will join together to make our solutions even more tangible and long lasting.

Another educational opportunity could include “Direct Care Master Classes” from the excellent care providers of STS, on full service care for the medically fragile , or palliative care, skin care, and elder care, in general. Tips on what to look for etc. As you well know, diversity and inclusion needs to extend into old age. Unfortunately, our elders especially during this pandemic, have once again borne the brunt. Our nursing homes are in full blown collapse and no longer a suitable option for our populations needs. Unfortunately, they are dying rooms and managed by a cocktail of drugs and the least amount of staff possible. This is unhuman and unconscionable.

Education could also extend to the Arts. As you well know, the great success of the theater and collaborative arts programs for our population. This would be, especially at this time, a great upliftment to our communities and motivate our creative communities in healing, bringing us together and in a positive way. STS also has a theater which might be refurbished to accommodate this aspiration. The Arts often provide a path when other means don't.

Other thoughts:

Communication, connection and transparency needs to be improved amongst all parties. Especially oversight of abuse and neglect amongst private providers.

Better community public education, relations and public service announcements.

Increase behavioral and mental health supports.

Elevation of care staff in private provider environments; this would include and not limited to, wages, training, certifications, opportunities and career paths within the system.

Thank you for your time, attention and diligence in assuring excellent care for all our DDS clients and their families. This is an especially important mission at this time.

Monthly and Weekly “State of DDS: reports to keep families and providers “literally” on the same page. Once a quarter is not reactive enough for our present needs or climate. We need to pull together and it must be now. The time is ripe for excellent change, creativity and innovation. We must cease the moment. It can be done, and we can rise to a better, higher and more humane place for all.

Looking forward to many, many wonderful possibilities
Thank you for all you do!

All the best and more in 2022 – 2027!

Sincerely, warmest regards,

Rose Petruzzi