

Regional Community, Agency, and School Alliance (RCASA) Minutes- January 22, 2021

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Presentations:

Sumana Silverheels

WNY Collegiate Consortium of Disability Advocates (CCDA)

Email: silvers@buffalostate.edu

Sumana spoke today regarding supports and resources available for WNY college students through CCDA. This is a voluntary group comprised of secondary education professionals, along with professionals who are directly involved in working with students that have disabilities. Sumana explained that this group's focus has expanded to include the preparation of high school students with disabilities for transition to college.

Sumana informed us that College Night will be held at Daemen College this year in-person. The date and more information are still to come.

Sumana spoke about current news regarding college. SUNY is making an effort to create more online degrees. Due to the pandemic, colleges are seeing students that were educated differently and will be over the next few years. The students entering into college now with just high school GPA are struggling. Sumana mentioned that colleges are seeing an increase of students with mental health concerns at this time.

There is assistance available on campuses for students: college writing centers, math assistance and library resources. For more information, contact Sumana or email: wnyccda@gmail.com.

Rachel Martin

Vice President

Person Centered Services

Email: rmartin@personcenteredservices.com

Rachel spoke today regarding current trends in care coordination and transition planning for graduating OPWDD students. Rachel explained the process for graduating students with care coordination. Care Coordinators are closely following OPWDD transition packets.

OPWDD will review the transition packet and authorize services. After the approval by OPWDD, care coordinators will help families find service agencies.

There is a back log for agencies due to the staffing crisis. Care coordination will prepare to have everything in place for an individual and when there is an opening, they are ready to go.

Remember, schools are strength-based and OPWDD is needs based. The student's needs should be displayed on the exit summary and transition paperwork to justify services.

Rachel explained that NY is an employment first state in regards to individuals with disabilities. If work will not be a possibility, then the team will work towards habilitative goals instead for day hab without walls, community hab, etc.

Rachel spoke about OPWDD housing, which goes from least restrictive first. There are rental subsidies available and depending on what kind of support is needed, supported apartments. Group home placements are limited and will go to those that are homeless or in neglectful situations first.

Rachel spoke about students graduating at 18 years old and how this could affect OPWDD services. Students should be encouraged to stay in school until 21. If the student is ready to graduate and to go to work, it may make sense. However, if the student would be most likely in a day hab, they should stay in school where they receive programming five days per week. If graduating early, OPWDD needs more documentation and school will need to show what was provided to the student while they were in school. There will need to be justification to authorize services.

Rachel mentioned that care coordinators should be invited to school meetings for students of all ages. There is an improved relationship with all providers if the care coordinator is involved. For students 18 and above, please involve your student's care coordinator at school meetings.

For families that do not need a lot of services at the time, care coordination can provide basic services with meetings for a life plan twice per year. More information, please contact PCS at 855-208-3533 or email: customerservice@personcenteredservices.com.

Caitlin Wetherwax
Accessibility Services
Niagara County Community College
716-614-6229
[Email: cwetherwax@niagara.suny.edu](mailto:cwetherwax@niagara.suny.edu)

Caitlin spoke to us regarding NCCC's Accessibility Office and from a community college perspective. She spoke about the differences in class offerings at a community colleges. For example, certificate or hands-on programs such as culinary.

NCCC's Accessibility Office has the same process as the universities. Parents need reminders on understanding differences between services at school and college.

An important reminder to students and families, at seven years, schools no longer keep student records. If a student wants to return to college after seven years, they will need to get re-

evaluated if they didn't keep their school paperwork. Many students do not know their disability diagnosis or have medical documentation.

Parents and care coordinators can attend meetings with the Accessibility Office. Once a plan is put in place, the student does not need to come back in. If something is not working during the school year, the student can come back in for changes.

Dorm accommodations should be coordinated with the school as soon as possible. This should be done at least by summer so the Accessibility Office can coordinate with the student's doctor. Appointments with the Accessibility Office can be scheduled one year ahead of time. Meetings are scheduled through an online calendar on NCCC's website. Schools can fax documents over to NCCC Accessibility office.

Marilyn Patterson
Disability Resource Coordinator
Niagara's Worksource One
1001 Eleventh St.
Niagara Falls, NY 14301
716-278-1695
Email: Marilyn.Patterson@niagaracounty.com

Marilyn is the Disability Resource Coordinator at Worksource One and she assists with employment and benefit information for individuals with disabilities. She may refer out to a different agency, or individuals may stay on her caseload depending on their situation. Marilyn also works with the Ticket To Work Program for ages 18-24.

Marilyn provided information regarding programs available at Niagara's Worksource One. Niagara County Summer Youth Program, is currently accepting applications for ages 14-20. Applications are available on the website. Students must go through their guidance offices to apply and working papers are needed. This is a TANF based program and students must meet the eligibility for services. There are placements all over Niagara County and they will try to match up students to their interests. There is no job coaching support available. However, if student is linked with ACCES-VR, they can be connected to job coach support. Contact person is dawn.cody@niagaracounty.com

Worksource One offers an In-School Program for high school seniors that are facing barriers. Students that OPWDD will not support could benefit from this program, such as students with ADHD or LD.

Additionally, there is an Out-of-School Program for 16-24 year olds that are not attending school and facing barriers. This program offers pay to gain work skills, job search, explore

career options, and work towards a GED/TASC. For additional information contact Dawn Cody.
Email: dawn.cody@niagaracounty.com.

There is a justice involved and ex-offender specialized program to assist job seekers who were previously convicted of a crime. For more information, please contact Worksource One. Niagara Falls location: 716-278-8108 or Lockport Office: 716-280-6185.

Kristine Snyder
Local School Transition Supervisor
OPWDD
585-241-5852
Email: Kristine.Snyder@opwdd.ny.gov

Kristine is the supervisor for Finger Lakes and Western districts. She introduced Dustin Ghezaili, the new local OPWDD Western Transition contact person. (He replaced Stephanie McLean Beathley). Dustin's email: dustin.t.ghezaili@opwdd.ny.gov.

Kristine explained the transition process for OPWDD. In July, transition packets are sent out for the new year. This is information that will go between schools, care coordinators, and OPWDD. The packet is sent to OPWDD with the exit summary, survey, and documents. It is good to be strength-based, but also you need to show the student's needs for services with OPWDD.

You can contact Kristine or Justin if you need information to whether a student has OPWDD eligibility and what agency they are working with. Kristine mentioned it is important to prepare early for transition planning and linkage to OPWDD. Any questions, please contact Dustin or Kristine.

Melissa Golpl
Independent Broker
OPWDD Self-Directed Services
716-903-1391
Email: melissa@selfdirectionpsa.com

Melissa is an independent broker and works with individuals and families regarding self-directed services. She spoke about benefits of self-direction through OPWDD. There is more control over services, but comes with a lot of responsibility.

With a self-directed plan, you can pay more than an agency can and develop a plan to that suits individual interests. Melissa stated that with documentation for OPWDD, it is important to show the needs of individual. The exit summaries should reflect what is needed to support the student after graduation.

During planning for a self-directed plan, the family, Fiscal Intermediary, broker, care coordinator develop a budget. Traditional services can still be used in the plan. Self-direction can help in areas that services cannot. Self-directed plans can use housing subsidy, community classes (not college), and to support community hab staff. Community classes have to have a two way interactive inclusion in the community. There is a pilot program running right now on utilizing community hab staff while staying in a college dorm. For more information, contact www.opwdd.ny.gov/selfdirection.

Updates:

Person Centered Services: Alan Vensky spoke about hot topic webinars that are available on Person Centered Services website. March's hot topic was "Finding a Job". Webinars are recorded. Save the date for DD Day on October 18, 2022. This event will be on-line due to staffing crisis. Further information to follow.

West Regional Partnership Center: Julia Duerr spoke about upcoming trainings. In April: Student Exit Summary Workshop and Diploma and Credential Options. Additional information about training is available on Erie 1 BOCES website under Special Education Support.

April and May 2022 meetings will be combined with the Ddawy Transition Group.

Next RCASA meeting will be 2022-23 school year. More information will be available in early September.