

Aspire's Mission:

Aspire's mission is to support children and adults with developmental and similar disabilities, helping them to live their lives to the fullest by providing individualized assistance based on personal choices.

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Save the Date

**DDAWNY Family
Committee Meeting**
7 Community Drive
Cheektowaga, NY
Third Tuesday of the Month
7:00 pm

For event information,
please contact Peggie Giambra
at 716-505-5502 or via email at
peggie.giambra@aspirewny.org

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Opening the Front Door to Adult Services and Transition



When students with developmental disabilities turn 21 and are ready to graduate or leave high school, their service needs change as they move on. "Some of these kiddos are used to having a big team at school," explains Jenna Astridge, LMSW, Director/Agency Outreach & Central Intake Aspire WNY. "For example, they had the support of their teacher, a special ed teacher, maybe a speech pathologist and all the different members of their school team. That's why it's so important for them to have a good plan when they're coming out." The OPWDD Front Door is how that plan takes shape and how many of the "What do we do now?" questions get answered. It's the transition process students go through to let OPWDD know they're ready to transition from educational to adult services, and it begins with a person-centered approach that prioritizes the individual's choices, needs and desires in making decisions about their future. The Transition Packet must accompany every student when they're welcomed through the Front Door. It gives their school team the opportunity to inform their new team about what the student has been doing, what supports they've received and what's been working so their adult services team can give them the support they need. To learn more about Front Door, visit www.opwdd.ny.gov/welcome-front-door or call 1-800-487-6310.

ACRONYM CORNER

OPWDD – Office for People With Developmental Disabilities
PCP – Person Centered Planning
IEP – Individual Education Plan
WNYDDRO – Western New York Developmental Disabilities Regional Offices
ACCES-VR – Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation
MSC – Medicaid Service Coordinator
CCO – Care Coordination Organization
CFL – Center for Learning

Ready for the New Year and New Transitions

Last year, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) improved the way supports and services are coordinated for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As of July 1, Care Coordinators (formerly called Medicaid Service Coordinators) were removed from provider agencies and brought together into six Care Coordination Organizations (CCO) across New York State and no longer deployed from individual agencies. The goal of this systematic change was to provide conflict-free case management for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities so they have the most comprehensive access to services. The 2018/2019 school year is the first full year that the OPWDD transition process will look different now under the Care Coordination model.

CARE COORDINATOR = LIFELINE

During this process, the Care Coordinator helps make sure students have everything they need to transition successfully through the Front Door, collecting the Transition Survey that outlines what services they've been getting and what they want to do moving forward. The Care Coordinator also submits an exit summary to the Front Door which is the educational support team's summary of what the student has learned, what they've worked on, and where their team feels they could use support. Then the Front Door contacts the family and Care Coordinator to discuss services and will authorize services as appropriate based on these discussions.

Jenna wants parents to be reassured: "An important thing to remember about the transition process is that it hasn't changed. Aspire of WNY's Center for Learning (CFL) has the process well defined. The piece that has changed, that's important for families to know, is that their Care Coordinator has a new home base so how and where you reach them is different. But they're still your lifeline, and your kids will still get what they need. That won't change." "It was always a team effort," adds Sarah, "but now it's even more important for the team to have good communication." (If you're not sure who your student's Care Coordinator is, please contact Person Centered Services at (716) 324-5100 or Prime Care Coordination at (844) 347-3168. They're ready to help!)

PREPPING FOR THE APRIL DEADLINE

Kids need a plan in place before they graduate; April is the deadline for transition pre-planning. "This is a critical time to have a Care Coordinator by your side,



guiding you through the process, helping to gather the documentation, and how to find answers to your many questions," advises Jenna Astridge, LMSW, Director/Agency Outreach & Central Intake Aspire WNY. The transition can seem daunting because many students have been with their educational team for years. They're leaving the familiar and being faced with a whole new adult services support team. Sarah agrees: "It's important to give the new team as much information about the student as possible so they can provide the best support services. But it can feel overwhelming. That's why it's really important for the student's parents or guardian to have a Care Coordinator they can count on – someone who fits with them and who they trust." Jenna adds, "They may be the only team member who's not going to change, other than the guardian. Over the course of my time working in Medicaid Service Coordination, I probably transitioned about 10 children into adult services. The role of the (now) Care Coordinator is important to providing a level of familiarity and comfort to the student, to see that their interests are being upheld and that they're satisfied with the services they're getting." Care Coordinators are also instrumental in relaying messages to the new support team.

NEED TO KNOW:

- Medicaid Services Coordinators are now called BOTH Care Managers and Care Coordinators (In Western New York, they are called Care Coordinators)
- The transition to CCO's began July 1, 2018 for all of New York State
- The Transition pre-planning deadline for students is Friday April 30, 2019

WORKING FOR ONE OF THE BEST

Wegmans is well known for being one of the best companies to work for and employees will tell you they're treated like family. Sydney Stisser, a graduate of Aspire of WNY's World of Work™ (WOW) program, joined the Wegmans family this past July following a successful internship. Leslie Baragona, Senior WOW Associate, was her on-site job coach and recalls Sydney setting her sites on working for Wegmans. "I said, 'All right then, these are the things we need to focus on.' She was on board. Her family was very supportive and worked on skills at home. If there were times when I needed to jump behind the Sub Shop counter to help her with building that confidence, then that's what I did for her," says Leslie. "But on most occasions, she worked right with the manager and the staff and they mentored her. And now, her mentor is her supervisor and she made that transition to employment."

Leslie praises Wegmans' mentorship as "above and beyond" for her students. "They've really taken us under their wing," she says. "Wegmans gives the students a uniform – a shirt, a nametag, a hat, anything they need to follow state protocol. And that just helps the students take ownership," she believes. "They feel like they're part of the staff. It's not just an internship, they're working ... and they never want to leave!" But it goes much deeper than that.

"Wegmans chooses their participating locations based on where they think the students will be most successful," explains Leslie. "They identify where there will be a phenomenal mentor." For Sydney, that mentor-turned-supervisor is Dave Gibson, Sub Shop Team Leader at Wegmans on McKinley Parkway in Hamburg. Dave has a background working with individuals with disabilities and it was a natural transition for him to mentor and train WOW students. "I thank Wegmans and I thank Aspire for giving me the opportunity to work with the WOW students," says Dave. He appreciates that they always come into his department with great attitudes, where they're met by a team ready to go out of their way to help. "My whole team owns a portion of the training and it's so rewarding to see the interaction when these young people start 'getting it.' The greatest sensation for me is seeing them progress, knowing that they understand and are confident," he adds. "And when they leave I want them to believe, 'I helped this department. My time here was beneficial to everybody.'" Leslie credits Dave with knowing when to push the students a little bit – "He'll say, 'You can do this. We have our tools, we've trained, we've practiced. Now try it.' When the students make a mistake he says, 'That's okay. Everybody does it. That's how we learn, and now we keep moving.'"



Sydney Stisser

Dave says Sydney brought a lot of enthusiasm to her internship at Wegmans. "Finding her the right spot in the employment environment was the thing to be done," he comments, "and I give Leslie Baragona all the credit in the world for staying involved and knowing what questions to ask us and to ask Sydney. Through her experience in the WOW program, she learned what it means to work with other people, what it means to be in a work setting, and what's expected of her in the workplace."

Sydney's parents, Gary and Linda Stisser, believe the WOW program takes vocational exploration and training to a higher level than other opportunities and they appreciate the hands-on job coaching. "Sydney was in the WOW program for three years," says Gary. "We asked her school if she could continue WOW during her senior year because she was doing so much better in the program. Wegmans was her last placement and that was the decision-maker."

Sydney's dad says her mentor Dave was great through the whole process. "After Sydney's training through WOW, Dave told her there could be a good job opportunity for

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Working for One of the Best

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her. Through timing and networking, it opened up a door for her to apply." During the application process, Wegmans encouraged Sydney to do everything for herself – from submitting the online application to the interview. "They were really pushing her to be independent," Gary recalls. "And they're very understanding. Wegmans is kind of incredible, to be honest with you. To be able to go to work for Wegmans in any job is a privilege," he continues. "They're great with the community and it's a great place for Sydney to work." "Sydney is very outgoing, very social," says her mom, Linda. "She loves it at Wegmans and they love her, too." In her job, Sydney gets to interact with customers and do food prep tasks. She enjoys training other workers but her favorite part of working at Wegmans is making the subs, even through the noon lunch rush.

Leslie is grateful for the continued partnership with Wegmans. "They have staff who've been with them for 40 years. They acknowledge there's longevity in their employees, and loyalty. It's so nice for the students in the WOW program to see that, to see moms and kids or husbands and wives who are working there together because it's such a family oriented company," Leslie says. "Wegmans really does treat their employees like family, and our students jump right in. That's all we can ask for: take our students and help train them and one day they may be able to work there."

A number of students have gained employment through their WOW internships. Leslie explains the goal is to help students be as independent as possible as soon as possible – "Sydney is successful and I'm just so proud of her! She's working, she has paid employment. That was her goal. And she achieved it right out of school. She must feel like a million bucks!" And Sydney does: "I can't even believe I have a job!" Next on Sydney's road to independence is getting her driver's license so she can get back and forth to work by herself. Way to go, Sydney!



Fast Facts for All Transitioning Students

June 2019:

Transition process applies to any student exiting school during the 2018/2019 school year

Western Region 1:

Process applies to students residing in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara and Orleans counties

Year-long process:

A Care Coordinator or Care Manager helps guide the way through all transition process steps

Friday, April 30, 2019:

Deadline for transition pre-planning. (If student isn't referred during pre-planning period, referral to Western Region 1 Front Door is still required.)

Transition Survey:

Must be submitted for all transitioning students

Contact Front Door:

1-800-487-6310

Contact Transition Coordinator:

With questions and to submit all transition packets, contact Stephanie McLean Beathley, LMSW at 716-608-2732 and stephanie.e.mclean-beathley@opwdd.ny.gov.

Comments, Suggestions or Ideas?

If you have any comments, suggestions or a subject you would like to see in an upcoming newsletter, please contact Paula Kerber at 716-505-5262, or email paula.kerber@aspirewny.org.

Want an electronic copy of Transition Times?

Send your email to: paula.kerber@aspirewny.org and we'll send you an electronic version of Transition Times. Thanks for your interest!

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