



Disability Rights Louisiana Report to the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council for January 2025

Program Updates

DRLA's Client Assistance Program (CAP) helps people with disabilities who are receiving or applying for services from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) and American Indian Rehabilitation Services (AIRS) to understand all their benefits and rights under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. CAP may assist consumers and applicants in pursuing legal, administrative or other appropriate avenues to protect their rights. The CAP program is currently assisting 44 people regarding problems receiving and maintaining vocational rehabilitation services. In the most recent quarter, CAP conducted outreach to LRS Regional Offices for the purpose of introducing a new CAP program manager and promoting collaboration between LRS and DRLA. In 2025 CAP will focus on training people with disabilities and their family members about employment prior to the traditional transition age.

In DRLA's Community Living Ombudsmen Program (CLOP), trained advocates, who are known as ombudsmen, advocate for the people with developmental disabilities who live in state-licensed, privately-run group homes (ICFs/DD) across the state in order to ensure their rights are protected and they are free from abuse or neglect. Between July 1 and September 30, 2024, the CLOP program served 3906 people with developmental disabilities living in group homes in Louisiana. CLOP staff completed 401 visits and 2290 resident contacts. During that period, there were 163 documented complaints.

DRLA's Supported Independent Living Advocacy Program (SILAP) serves individuals with developmental disabilities who are receiving OCDD waiver services and supports in order to live in their homes in the community. SILAP provides free services to persons residing in supported independent living environments in the State of Louisiana Human Services Districts I, II, and X, which encompass the greater New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. Between July 1 and September 30, 2024, the SILAP program served 36 individuals. During this period, SILAP:

- Assisted a client in contacting the mobile crisis unit during a meeting to address her mental health,
- Assisted clients with provider issues, including staffing and transportation,
- Advocated for clients with problems in their living conditions, such as sewage leaking into their apartment and updating a lease,



- Assisted a client with confirming her Medicaid enrollment,
- Advocated for apartment building management to make necessary repairs,
- Advocated for clients to get the needed "bump up" on waiver from ROW to NOW, which will give the clients more support hours,
- Assisted a client in connecting with family members, and
- Located and made referrals to outside housing resources for clients.

DRLA's Representative Payee Program strengthens protections for social security beneficiaries. The program provides oversight to representative payees regarding their services to beneficiaries, as well as giving them support to better understand their role and responsibilities. Since the beginning of the Rep Payee year (August 1, 2024), we have finished 21 % (11) of the target number of cases for the year. We currently have 26 other cases in progress. We anticipate we will meet or exceed our targeted number of cases by the end of the grant year (7/31/2025). During a recent review, our Team became aware of a Representative Payee who was charging a fee to beneficiaries for providing Rep Payee services without the permission of the Social Security Administration. We made SSA aware of this unauthorized practice. SSA investigated and advised the Representative Payee they must reimburse all the beneficiaries that they serve for the improper fees that they charged the beneficiaries.

DRLA's Financial Access Inclusion and Resources program (FAIR) provides financial coaching and case management services to assist formerly incarcerated people with disabilities in overcoming employment and resource barriers, in order to achieve long term financial security. Our services are holistic and are centered around the individual needs of people with disabilities, who may require additional supports and services to successfully reenter their communities after incarceration.

FAIR recently completed a quarterly report to the City of New Orleans regarding our clients in Orleans Parish. Between July 1 and September 30, 2024, the FAIR program provided financial coaching and case management services to 23 Orleans Parish residents. These services included helping clients:

- Access healthcare services,
- Receive Benefits Counseling,
- Enroll a minor child in school,



- Obtain auto insurance,
- Obtain a vehicle,
- Perform an apartment search,
- Explore workforce development and vocational rehabilitation programs,
- Replace a state ID,
- Negotiate issues relate to wages,
- Locate emergency shelters,
- Connect to primary care providers,
- Create resumes, apply for jobs, and prepare for job interviews,
- Apply for apartments, rental assistance, SSI/SSDI, SNAP, subsidized housing, transitional housing, and utility assistance.

Of these clients:

- 4 or 17% have reduced their debt by a collective total of \$21,535,
- 13 or 57% have increased their income by a collective total of \$11,090 per month,
- 13 or 57% were employed during this period, with 10 of those individuals or 77% having maintained that employment for over 90 days.

These results are significant because about 22% of people with disabilities nationally, regardless of criminal records, are employed. The people with disabilities that the FAIR program serves face compounded employment and economic barriers related to both their disabilities and their experience in incarceration. People with criminal records, regardless of disabilities, are 50% less likely to receive a job offer.

Example of Recent Success

SILAP was contacted by a family of a man on a NOW waiver, who had been experiencing conflict with his longtime provider. The family documented piles of dirty laundry and spoiled food in the apartment. They also documented the sloppy administration of medication. The client and his family were apprised of his rights as an OCDD waiver recipient. SILAP determined that they did not know that they had a right to switch agencies. When they had this knowledge, the client with the assistance of his family members, with whom he has a close and trusting relationship, contacted alternative agencies to



set up interviews. The client was able to make a switch to a new support coordination agency and a new provider agency. Despite the client initially having difficulty adjusting to the change, since adjusting to his new provider and support coordinator the client reports great satisfaction with his current services.