



Community Support for People with Developmental Disabilities

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The guiding principles of Louisiana's Act 378 of 1989 clearly state that individuals with developmental disabilities "should be afforded the opportunity to make decisions for themselves and to live in typical homes and communities where they can exercise their full rights and responsibilities as citizens" and that children, regardless of the severity of their disability, "need families and enduring relationships with adults in a nurturing home environment."

The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council stands by these guiding principles and the abundance of research demonstrating the benefits of individualized community support over the institutional placement of individuals with developmental disabilities.

Research has demonstrated for decades that people with developmental disabilities living in their own homes or with their families, with appropriate supports, are healthier, happier, and more satisfied with their lives than those living in congregate settings.¹ Additionally, people who move from institutions to community settings are financially better off, are better able to function independently, have more meaningful relationships and control over their lives.¹ Despite compelling research and the transition of hundreds of people from state-run institutions, Louisiana still ranks first in the country (by a large margin) for the number of individuals per capita living in intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ICFs/IID).² This is primarily due to the large number of people in private residential facilities.

The Council believes that principles, such as those captured in Act 378 of 1989, should drive all community supports and services so they are designed to maximize success, delivered in the most individualized environment, and enable people with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination and control over their daily lives to the fullest extent possible. Unfortunately, the current support system sometimes fails to meet this standard due to the unavailability of adequately trained and compensated staff, particularly for those with complex medical and/or behavioral support needs. Without the availability of trained staff, families sometimes find themselves in crisis and are left with no other option but to pursue out-of-home placement for their family member.

A quality, well-trained and stable work force of direct support professionals (DSPs) who receive a competitive, living wage is critical to ensure successful community living outcomes. It is therefore imperative that Medicaid provider reimbursement rates are reliable and sufficient to sustain a statewide system of services that attracts and retains quality providers capable of maintaining a stable workforce. This system must include a sufficient number of providers to allow for meaningful choices by individuals with disabilities and their families. The availability of training and technical assistance for providers, support coordinators, and



staff employed by those who self-direct their services, particularly related to supporting individuals with complex medical and behavioral health needs, is also critical.

Community support for individuals with disabilities is cost effective, but more importantly, it allows for greater quality of life, fuller participation in society, larger social networks and meaningful relationships, and positive behavioral outcomes. In Louisiana, high quality individualized support in the community should be the standard for serving people with developmental disabilities and all public policy should facilitate that outcome.

References:

- 1 Community Living and Participation for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: What the Research Tells Us, The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), 2-3.
- 2 In-Home and Residential Long-Term Supports and Services for Persons with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends Through 2016, Research and Training Center on Community Living Institute on Community Integration/UCEDD, University of Minnesota, 2018, Compare States: ICF/IID Residents.