

**Public Testimony in Preparation for the 2008-2209 Budget  
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I take the words of our state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and our Governor, Elliot Spitzer when I look to how we can move forward for the citizens of New York State, doing so in such a way the takes into effect the budget challenge that lies ahead for us.

The revised Five Year Plan for OMRDD states that it is committed to actions that unite the mission and strategic direction of the agency with the broader goals set forth for New York State by the Governor and the Legislature, doing so by providing the highest level of quality, caring and competence.

We have heard our Governor's words loud and clear that all services are to be person first and personally focused. By doing so we will create more tailor made services that give only what is needed. Not what has been already established through standardized program models. We have believed for years that standardized models were the "be all and end all" for services for people in need. But I challenge us to think of how we can honestly move towards providing a service that is personally designed and economically realistic.

For years I have worked in the field and experienced people being either under supported or over supported in standardized congregate programs. I have seen that personal needs have been lost to program needs. I have seen waste of people's lives and

waste of program dollars. I have seen slots filled to ensure that budget is retained. I have seen more needy people looked over due to not fitting into the already established program types. I have seen people with lesser needs retained in program types still under a system that they no longer require.

The problem is our system response is to the needs of a program model not the needs of individuals. The challenge ahead is how to change a system with shrinking federal resources following the words and mission of the Governor and OMRDD.

With a person first system the community is now involved. The total responsibility does not need to rely on one entity. OMRDD does not have to be the entire funding service. There are many community resources that are available to any citizen that meets the financial or health care requirements that have been established. Generic housing, personal care, home health aides, nursing, home repair, first time home buyer packages, utility rebates, jobs; the list goes on as to what is available in each community and can be selected and utilized based on each person's needs. This is not a "one system fits all" approach. It is a system that designs a support and service that includes the community, family, social and bureaucratic supports. It is a system that can cost effectively provide the necessary supports without overtaxing any one entity.

At a Sharing Lives Conference a few weeks ago, our state residential association brought together people from around the north east to challenge the thinking of New York State Providers. There were numerous examples of person first practices that were cost effective and enhanced the lives of the people involved. What it showed was that there is no one approach when you look to move a system to a more personally designed and cost effective support structure. What it also showed is that with creatively and

combined resources many of the supports showed a higher quality of life for its citizens than our typical structure provide.

So why aren't agencies doing more of this? Possibly because there are guaranteed dollars when you manage congregate facilities, slots can be filled easily. A standardized service is more predictable; more easily managed and is more controllable by the service provider. But the big question is does it follow the words and vision of our Governor and OMRDD, and does it truly meet the needs of the individual in the best and most cost effective way?

I will end now with the experience of the State of Wisconsin. They used the rabbit approach. The state office first offered a carrot. I see today that the carrot is out there (person first language, shrinking budgets) but the question is who is following it, grabbing on to it and doing good with it? After a time in Wisconsin, when enough agencies did not grab onto the carrot, they used the stick and made a firm stance on what they would not support in the future and what would be funded in substitution. By doing this they wiped out a class of congregate facilities in their state and personalized arrangements then occurred.

I am challenging that New York State follow their words and make a stance if they truly want to transform a economical system of program delivery to a system of person first practices utilizing a combination community and generic resources for the betterment of life for our fellow New Yorkers. The time is right, if we do not grab on to it now, then once again, they are empty words with money flowing against the goals and vision we see for our fellow New Yorkers.