



DHS News

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Department of Human Services



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OID utilizes new approach to better serve individuals and their families

The DHS Office of Intellectual Disability (OID) has recently joined a nationwide Community of Practice (CoP) designed to assist families and individuals with an intellectual disability, autism diagnosis or developmental disabilities (ID/A). Allegheny County was one of the first counties in Pennsylvania to commit to this initiative in 2016.

The Community of Practice is centered on the belief that “all people have the right to live, love, work, play and pursue their life aspirations in their community,” and is a way of supporting families reflective of the fact that most people with ID/A are living with their families in the community.

After attending a national conference to learn more about the CoP, OID began piloting the CoP philosophy and foundations in July 2018. The pilot consists of adults ages 27 - 59, a group selected because it represents 17% of all intakes; these individuals often lack supports from formal systems, such as schools, CYF or aging; and adults with I/DD may have family members who also need support.

“The people who call us need help, and they often need it urgently,” said Lynn Pugliano, eligibility supervisor in OID. “With the pilot program, we wanted to make sure that individuals don’t have to wait for an eligibility determination to receive assistance. We want to help everyone, regardless of whether they officially qualify for services.”

The CoP approach begins at intake. When a request for services is received at OID, the individual is moved through the eligibility process while simultaneously receiving LifeCourse planning services. OID staff members meet with the individual in-person to gather information in the LifeCourse planning tool, which is a guide to help staff have a meaningful conversation with individuals about what is happening in six areas of their life – daily life and employment, healthy living, community living, safety and security, social and spirituality, and citizenship and advocacy – and steps that can be taken to move closer to the life the individual envisions for themselves. OID staff fills in the tool, taking notes of needs for both the individual and any immediate family members.

Once the LifeCourse assessment is completed, OID staff members work to find the most appropriate resources for the family. As part of the CoP process, OID has created a

centralized resource database comprised of more than 850 agencies offering more than 1000 services. With resources and services in mind, the OID staff members return to the individual to discuss an action plan and connect them to available resources. If eligible for additional OID services, the staff members can also conduct a warm handoff to a supports coordinator.

“One of the main goals of the CoP concept is making sure that everyone is working toward their ‘good life,’” Lynn continued. “By shifting our mindset from focusing solely on compliance and processes, we’re able to help our consumers maximize their strengths and have the needs they deem most important met quickly.”

Since implementing the CoP philosophy, Allegheny County’s OID has been recognized as a leader in this approach. OID staff has been invited to regional and state meetings to discuss their progress and offer advice. They also presented at this year’s Charting the Life Course Showcase, a national conference hosted in Kansas City.

In the future, OID hopes to expand the CoP by sharing its philosophies with provider agencies and increasing collaboration between DHS, providers, schools and other formal systems.

To learn more about the Community of Practice, contact Lynn at lynn.pugliano@alleghenycounty.us.