

## Draft Policy on Social Inclusion

All supports offered by the Department of Developmental Services shall be provided in a manner that enhances opportunities for individuals to become fully engaged members of their community. Supports should actively work to ensure that people are not just “in” the community but “of” it. The ultimate goal of the service system is to have communities that embrace the gifts, talents and capacities of ALL of its citizens and that those we support have the opportunity to have a bounty of friendships and relationships.

While acknowledging obstacles may exist that have the potential to limit progress toward meeting this goal, every effort should be made within available resources to seek out and creatively make use of the possibilities for social inclusion that exist in every community while encouraging the use of natural supports whenever possible and appropriate. With that end in mind, the following are a list of expectations we have for the Department and the agencies with which it contracts for services:

1. Engagement by individuals in community activities will be based on the individual’s interests as expressed through their person centered planning process (ISP or PCP) and continuous opportunities to explore potential new interests in the community will be made available.
2. Procedures will be put in place in order to balance risk with opportunities for growth when considering new activities that are being pursued with and for individuals. Potential risks should be acknowledged and reasonable safeguards should be put in place in a way that does not overly limit life experiences. In alignment with the HCBS Community Rule, restrictions to modes of communication including phone, mail and internet (including email and social networks) may only be implemented if there is a justified person-specific risk that is outlined in the person’s ISP, agreed to by the ISP team and reviewed by the appropriate human rights committee
3. Training will be made available to support staff to help them become better community connectors and to understand the communities in which they work. In addition, consultation will be made available to programs to explore creative practices that enhance relationship development and community engagement e.g. recruitment, matching and supporting volunteers to share in everyday interests they have in common with individuals.
4. Organizations will review personnel policies and practices to ensure that the responsibilities of staff members includes supporting individuals to develop friendships with community members. This may be done through voluntary participation together in a variety of social activities of mutual interest. These activities may include such things as being invited to share in a holiday dinner or going to a concert or sporting event where connections with others is likely to occur. If a staff member leaves the job, the social connection that has been developed with an individual should be supported if mutually desired unless there is a justifiable reason not to do so.
5. DDS regulations, provider policies and “house rules” will be reviewed periodically and altered as needed to promote social inclusion and prevent unnecessary restrictions.
6. New strategies should be pursued to enhance the availability of transportation for individuals to become more mobile in their communities, especially during hours typical for social engagement.

This Draft Policy has been derived from the input gained through a joint project between DDS and The Center for Developmental Disability Evaluation and Research (CDDER) located at U Mass Shriver. See the attached white paper developed as a result of that partnership. This working draft will be modified after gaining more input from a variety of stakeholders.

The final policy will be followed up through a variety of events and/ or information sharing activities that will serve to support implementation of this policy so that it becomes a “live” document.