Moving Forward in Enhancing Supports for Families: Action Plan for Family Support

In the fall of 2011 the Department of Developmental Services initiated a strategic planning process as part of a renewed emphasis on the importance of supporting families caring for a family member at home. Based on input from more than 1300 families, a report "In Their Own Words" was developed and distributed in 2012. This report was a "call to action" to help families meet the demands of caregiving across the lifespan. The important supports needed by caregivers and the benefits and cost-effectiveness of family support were identified. There are currently more than 20,000 Massachusetts citizens caring for a child or adult family member with an intellectual or developmental disability at home. Families readily take on their role and require comparatively small amounts of support to help them continue. Family support is 75% to 80% less expensive than out-of-home placement.

As identified in this report, the Department believes a responsive system of supports must:
- *Build on the capacities of families;*
- *Be complemented by an array of state-funded direct resources and supports that assist families to meet caregiving needs;*
- *Cultivate community partnerships and access to generic resources, including formal and informal support; and*
- *Enhance the capacity of communities to value and support people with disabilities and their families through outreach and education.*

This Action Plan is the next phase in this strategic planning initiative and addresses six areas of focus that were highlighted in this report. Workgroups composed of Family Support Council members, family members, family support providers, and DDS staff were established to examine these areas and create recommendations. This Plan, developed jointly with the Statewide Family Support Council, is a summary of the results of these efforts and identifies a series of specific goals with short-term and long-term activities to develop a more comprehensive, integrated, and responsive system of supports for families of children and adults living at home.

The Six Focus Areas are:
1) *Improving communication about the Chapter 688 process and transition planning;*
2) *Expanding social activities and connections in the community, including opportunities to form relationships that may lead to friendships;*
3) *Providing resources for families regarding planning for their family member's future across the lifespan;*
4) *Developing a sufficient cadre of qualified staff to provide supports to families and mechanisms for identifying staff, such as an on-line directory;*
5) *Developing a comprehensive approach to community education and building local partnerships; and*
6) *Expanding access to information, resources and supports for families and improving communication methods through technology.*

The Workgroups found overlap and themes in the types of recommendations and ideas that were generated that clustered into four general categories:

- **Information/Resource and Materials Development** – to provide quality, accessible, and standardized information and to better utilize technology;

- **Training** - building knowledge and capacity through education, training, and support for families that addresses common topical areas across the lifespan; development of expertise/competencies for DDS and Family Support provider staff and other support workers;

- **Service Delivery/Practice Considerations** – development of more coordinated and integrated approaches to promote consistency in information sharing and interactions with individuals and families by DDS and Family Support provider staff, including Family Support and Autism Support Centers, specialized family support programs and other providers of services; and

- **Expansion and enhancement of services in specific areas**, such as social and recreational opportunities and community partnerships.

Another overarching common theme that emerged relates to the important need to be responsive to the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of families across the state when developing and implementing different strategies and approaches.

Finally, given the amount of work needed to implement many of these recommendations, the workgroups identified both short-term (by 12/31/14) and longer-term (by 6/30/16) timelines to accomplish these goals. The scope of activities in this Family Support Action Plan will happen concurrently with other strategic agency –wide efforts to expand resources and provide an array of direct funding/services to families and explore ways to foster more effective interagency partnerships.

Implementation of Goals and Action Steps

A comprehensive and detailed workplan will be developed that sets specific timelines and responsibilities for implementation and work on recommended goals and activities. This will provide a framework for focusing efforts and structuring resources to implement specific action steps on selected goals. The full reports developed by each Workgroup will be used to provide additional background information and elaboration on recommended goals and action steps. This will be a dynamic process, with opportunities for reviewing progress, making adjustments and revising the workplan to be responsive to emerging needs. Ongoing progress reports will be developed to inform stakeholders of the accomplishments towards meeting the goals and will be made available on the DDS website.

Multiple approaches will be used to work on implementation activities including:

- The Statewide Family Support Council will continue to play an advisory role in providing input on progress and accomplishments and to identify areas for further development and expansion.
- DDS statewide and regional family support directors will assume a leadership role in organizing efforts to implement the goals and action steps in specific focus areas; they will seek participation, input and expertise from DDS staff, family support provider staff, family members and other agencies to work on specific goals and action steps.
- Existing avenues will be utilized for information sharing, dissemination of resources and capacity building of knowledge and expertise among family support service providers and DDS staff, such as standing regional meetings with providers and DDS staff.
- Additional training opportunities will be offered for staff to impart information, build expertise and share information on best practices in identified areas to support action plan implementation;
- Expectations will be integrated in contract performance measures and monitored through regular review meetings and the contract renewal process with family support providers;
- The capacity of the DDS website and other avenues such as webinars will be expanded to share information and resources;

Focus Area One:

Improving Communication for Chapter 688/Transition Planning

"Transition" is a complex process. Families continue to indicate that they do no have enough information, are disappointed at the options available, and/or do not know what will happen to their loved one until it is late in the process. Although information is available, it does not appear to be standardized and readily available in one place. Information and timelines for the earlier years of transition, ages 14-18, seem least familiar to families.

In order to assist families with the transition process, it is important to develop and support a strong base of understanding of transition issues among DDS and Family Support Center (FSC) staff. Cultural, linguistic and geographic differences need to be considered in these approaches. Some key principles that the group agreed upon include, but are not limited to:

- *Focus on self determination to enable individuals and families to have greater choice of services and providers to better meet their needs, and to support students to become as independent as possible and make decisions about their transition process as they are able.*
- *Define and ensure at least a minimum level of DDS involvement with all students.*
- *Standardize information and make it easy to understand. The Transition Coordinator should provide a copy of "The Road Forward", the 688 brochure, and the local Family Support Directory at the first meeting with the family.*
- *Recognize it is important to start planning at a younger age and make available more information on the earlier years of transition.*
- *Improve communication and collaboration between DDS, schools and other agencies.*
- *Make the DDS commitment to the "Employment First" policy a key component of the transition process.*
- *Clarify funding, transportation and program limitations up front.*
- *Ensure regular check-ins with families with the use of a standardized checklist to assess their understanding of the key elements of transition throughout the process.*

Key Need Areas and Issues to be Addressed:

- *Families need clear, standardized information with timelines.*
- *DDS Children's Coordinators, Transition Coordinators, and Family Support Center staff need a shared base of understanding of transition issues and timelines for students starting at age 14.*
- *Family Support Centers need to develop/enhance their expertise related to transition.*
- *A standardized curriculum of topics/materials related to transition needs to be developed with opportunities for training by age group and interests.*
- *A system needs to be developed to check in with families regularly about their understanding of what they should be aware of/act upon at each age with sensitivity to individual interests, culture, and language.*
- *Family Support Centers need to identify, engage, encourage and support individuals and families to support other families in the transition process.*
- *Address systemic barriers to successful transitions such as caseloads, proximity of referrals to day/habilitation programs, transportation, and beginning contacts at age 16.*

Focus Area One:

Improving Communication for Chapter 688 and the Transition Planning Process

Goal 1 **Provide training and materials on a standardized list of transition topics in all areas and regions of the state.**

Action Steps:

a) Finalize transition training topics, content and materials.

b) Sequence, schedule and arrange/provide trainings using standardized topics and content.

c) Review/update/expand "The Road Forward."

d) Develop a resource library at each Family Support and Autism Support Center of publications/resources related to transition. (long-term)

e) Develop a system for regular check-ins with families utilizing a standardized checklist; ensure an understanding of the prioritization process.

f) Explore the option of scheduling DDS Transition Coordinator drop-in days at Family Support Centers for individuals/families to meet jointly with DDS and family support staff. (long-term)

g) Arrange regular local provider forums/resource fairs so families learn about providers in their area and region.

Goal 2 **Enhance the level of expertise about transition, including for students age 14-18, among DDS Children's and Transition Coordinators and FSC staff.**

Action Steps:

a) Provide core training to DDS and FSC staff in each region to ensure consistent expertise.

b) Work toward having an existing Family Support Center staff member gain expertise in transition issues and planning; Area Offices and Centers should identify steps to accomplish this. (long-term)

c) Identify strategies and approaches to engage and support individuals and families to mentor and help others with the transition process. (long-term)

Focus Area Two:

Promoting and Expanding Social/Recreational Opportunities and Friendships

Individuals and families want their sons and daughters with disabilities to have an “active” social life with a variety of more age-appropriate social/recreational activities. Often families are unaware of local social and recreational opportunities available in their communities. There are a number of helpful websites, but they are not interconnected. Also, many websites are not current as they require active maintenance and management. Another issue is that individuals and families who live in more isolated and rural areas often have very limited or no access to the hub of most social/recreational activities.

In order to assist individuals and families in identifying and participating in activities that advance an individual’s social experiences and encourages friendships, the system must:

- *Disseminate current information about local social/recreational opportunities;*
- *Promote more inclusive social/recreational activities;*
- *Expand opportunities for developing friendships between people with and without disabilities; and*
- *Address other barriers to access and participation such as lack of transportation, shortages of trained staff, the need for additional flexible funding, etc.*

The *Real Friends Project*, recently established by DDS and the Arc of Massachusetts to address this need area, is a core catalyst to this effort. The objectives of this project are to:

- *Identify existing programs and approaches (formal and informal) that successfully bring people with and without disabilities together, resulting in the establishing of relationships which may grow or be nurtured into friendships.*
- *Identify existing trainings, workshops and other venues/materials that are available to help individuals, families and organizations learn how to support the development of relationships between people with and without disabilities.*
- *Make the materials identified easily accessible to interested individuals, families and organizations through web-based applications (and other applications) through The Arc of Massachusetts (www.arcmass.org).*
- *Analyze all of these resources to determine where gaps might be and to develop trainings/workshops/materials to fill those gaps.*

Focus Area Two:

Social/Recreational Opportunities and Promoting Friendships

Goal 1 Increase the awareness among families and individuals of opportunities in their local communities.

Action Steps:

a) Support Family and Autism Support Centers in maintaining resources through websites, newsletters, etc. to inform families about local opportunities.

b) Encourage providers/individuals/families to send information to the Real Friends Project.

c) Encourage organizations that operate social/recreational programs to "register" those programs with New England Index.

d) Ensure family support providers in conjunction with DDS Area Offices identify and respond to local barriers for individuals and families to access activities, to the extent possible. (long-term)

Goal 2 Foster more opportunities and initiatives whose mission is to connect individuals with their typical peers.

Action Steps:

a) Offer competitive mini-grants for initiatives that create inclusive opportunities with community partner organizations for individuals of all age groups, depending on available resources.

b) Collect and share current initiatives and strategies that have created inclusive social and friendship opportunities.

Goal 3 Increase opportunities for individuals to develop lasting relationships/friendships with people with and without disabilities.

Action Steps:

a) Continue the Real Friends Project through 2014.

b) Encourage family groups, Family Support Centers and Autism Support Centers to schedule "Introduction to Friends" workshops with the Real Friends Project staff.

c) Generate a list of consultants who are able to offer more "how to" trainings on developing lasting relationships to share with Family Support and Autism Support Centers.

d) Send Success Stories to Project staff for inclusion on their website.

Goal 4 Address family-identified barriers to access and participation in social/ recreational opportunities.

Action Steps:

a) Provide “Introduction to Friends” training statewide.

b) Create a series of fact sheets in New England Index that give ideas, strategies and resources to address barriers to accessing social/recreational opportunities. (long-term)

c) Make available new family support funding to offer stipends to families to access social opportunities, based on available funding resources.

Focus Area Three:

Distributing and Creating Resources for Families Regarding Planning for Their Family Member's Future

A major concern expressed by families relates to what the Department does to help families plan for the future. This focus area addresses communication and information sharing throughout all stages in life. Families need honest, transparent information available to them from the time they become eligible for DDS services in order for them to make informed choices throughout their family member's lifespan – which includes the need to make financial plans when possible. A particular area of emphasis is engaging families in planning for the time when they will no longer be the primary caregiver. A recurrent concern expressed by family members is "what will happen when I'm gone or cannot provide care."

Families need to have knowledge of the supports and resources that may be available for them to access and have realistic expectations for future supports. Often families describe not knowing where to begin or what questions to ask. These discussions need to begin early and continue throughout the years. The Workgroup identified the following key themes and issues. Families need:

- *An understanding of the "big picture" in order to plan effectively for their family members' futures;*
- *Pertinent information to assist them in understanding supports and services that may be available throughout their children's lives;*
- *Realistic information regarding supports available and the role DDS will serve in their child's life;*
- *Honest discussions with DDS about the important concerns of families regarding "what will happen when I'm no longer here";.*
- *Different types of information at different life stages, especially at key transition points;*
- *Information about public and private benefits, resources, generic and natural supports that might be available to support individuals and families; and*
- *Access to a knowledgeable person with expertise in disability information and other benefit programs and resources to help them identify, access, and navigate services.*

In developing recommendations, the workgroup reviewed publications available through DDS and outside sources and the DDS website regarding "planning." The types of trainings and presentations provided by DDS staff and Family Support Center staff were discussed.

Focus Area Three:

Distributing and Creating Resources for Families to Help Plan for Their Family Member's Future

Goal 1 Staff (DDS and Family Support Centers) should have ongoing conversations with families regarding the need to develop plans for the future.

Action Steps:

a) All DDS and Family Support Center (FSC) staff should use a common comprehensive tool to aid in discussions. Explore utilization of the “Family Support Inventory” developed for use by the Family Support Centers.

b) Update the "Family Support Inventory" to include additional future planning information and resources.

Goal 2 Families need to be aware of resources that may be available to them across the lifespan.

Action Steps:

a) Create information/fact sheets that clearly define services and resources at different life-stages: birth-3, age 3-14, age 15-18, age 18-22, age 22+; mid-life and aging.

b) Disseminate information/fact sheets to all Area Offices and Family Support Centers; make available on DDS website.

c) Ensure the approaches used for the development and dissemination of information and resources is responsive to the cultural and linguistic differences of families.

Goal 3 Trainings should be held on an ongoing basis for families, DDS and Family Support Center and provider staff.

Action Steps:

a) Offer a comprehensive array of trainings through a variety of venues including areas identified in different developmental periods/life stages noted in Goal 2.

b) Continue transition (Turning 22) trainings by the Area and Regional Offices on a regular basis and at least, annually.

c) Trainings should be available using the most current technology, e.g. webinars, podcasts, YouTube, etc. to make them accessible to a wide audience of families, individuals and staff, and need to be developed to be culturally and linguistically responsive and accessible. (long-term)

d) Meet with all Family Support Centers to discuss specific trainings for families that must occur to ensure consistency in all areas across the state.

e) Ensure trainings for staff regarding how to have planning discussions with families, e.g. realistic expectations of what DDS can offer and how to maximize other supports outside the Department. Work jointly with the Statewide DDS Training Coordinators to discuss the possibility of incorporating additional trainings for DDS, FSC, and provider staff in each region. (long-term)

f) Host trainings/information forums for the general public (including hospitals, pediatricians, schools, and state and community agencies) to discuss the role of DDS. (long-term)

Focus Area Four:

Developing a Sufficient Cadre of Qualified Staff to Support Individuals and Families

There is a great need to develop a workforce of qualified in-home workers for families. This is especially true for staff with expertise in specific areas to support individuals with specialized support needs such as autism and medical challenges. There is a need to reach out to staff and professionals currently doing this work in other settings, the general public, and higher education, and community college human service programs to develop an expanded qualified pool of workers to provide skills training and respite/companion support to families, especially those with expertise working with individuals with specialized support needs.

Families need better ways and resources to identify qualified respite and other in-home workers. Even if families have access to flexible funding/stipends to pay for staff, they often do not know where to begin to look for workers in their area who they think are adequately qualified and ready to work with their family member. Families also expressed concern with finding staff with the specific expertise to work with their loved one's particular diagnosis and related needs.

In order to develop a cadre of qualified staff and assist families, the system must:

- *Provide a more coordinated and easy-to-access way to find respite and other in-home staff. Any systems developed need to be accessible to people who may not have computer access or English as a primary language.*
- *Provide Family Support Centers access to a more statewide and centralized information clearinghouse to identify workers beyond their own pool of resources.*
- *Work to improve on-line directories that do currently exist but can be difficult to navigate.*
- *Assist in developing/identifying a pool of qualified staff who have* ***the specific expertise*** *to work with individuals with specific diagnoses and needs.*
- *Explore and develop partnerships with existing specialty training programs for clinical staff who may be a source for identifying staff with expertise in specific areas including autism.*
- *Identify respite training resources and curricula to make available to individual respite and other in-home workers as well as to Family Support Centers.*
- *Develop training opportunities for DDS staff and the provider community to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to meet the growing demand for supports to individuals on the Autism spectrum.*
- *Work with community colleges, universities and other organizations to make connections with and/or develop training opportunities for staff and to recruit potential workers.*

The efforts DDS will engage in will integrate and build upon the work of other initiatives. This includes agency-wide initiatives related to positive behavioral supports, building knowledge and capacity in meeting the needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and training and development partnerships with local colleges. Another related initiative is funded through a federal grant, The Massachusetts Lifespan Respite Coalition (MLRC) which has been working on similar issues to promote and support access to quality respite care options.

Focus Area Four:

Develop a Sufficient Cadre of Qualified Staff To Support Individuals and Families

Goal 1 Explore existing provider and worker listings to determine if they could be enhanced or customized for use by families to identify staff.

Action Steps:

a) Explore current qualified provider directories within DDS such as those in use for the Autism and Adult Waiver Programs for families to access.

b) Catalogue and disseminate to families information about existing private and public databases to recruit workers, such as NE Index.

c) Identify/Explore development of a partnership with Rewarding Work Resources, Inc. to include respite/in-home skills trainers and support worker listings on their website. (long-term)

Goal 2 Develop outreach and recruitment strategies to expand the pool of staff through linkages with education, clinical training programs and other community organizations.

Action Steps:

a) Expand upon and increase linkages with community colleges, universities and other institutions which provide human service and direct support training programs. Specifically identify existing training and internship model programs, such as the Central Massachusetts Respite Project, to explore feasibility of replication and application in other settings across the state. (long-term)

b) Develop presentations and a marketing strategy to inform students and other individuals about the need for staff and employment opportunities.

Goal 3 Improve access and opportunities to comprehensive respite and other in-home worker training materials and curricula to increase the cadre of qualified staff.

Action Steps:

a) Make available DDS training on relevant topical areas, such as positive behavioral supports.

b) Explore collaboration with other related training initiatives in the state, such as the Massachusetts Personal Care and Home Care Aide State Training Program grant team, to develop respite and in-home worker training modules. (long-term)

c) Identify and catalogue existing training curriculum and resources for respite workers, including web-based training opportunities, and build linkages with the massrespite.org web –site to make this information widely available.

d) Provide families with guidance materials about interviewing potential staff, and providing any other relevant training or information to workers they may need to meet the specialized support needs of their family member.

Focus Area Five:

Community Education and Partnerships

The community can be an enormous untapped resource of assistance to families. Developing an effective and comprehensive approach to community education and development, exploring partnerships and leveraging other resources benefit both the community and individuals and families. Families often experience disappointment and frustration in their local interactions with the public due to apprehension and a lack of experience and understanding about individuals with an intellectual disability. There is a great need to educate the public and build bridges and connections that benefit everyone.

Social inclusion for people with an intellectual disability consists of three key elements:

- *Being involved in the community*
- *Maintaining reciprocal relationships*
- *Having a sense of belonging*

Involvement in the community includes the use of community resources and participation in activities such as structured recreation, leisure, church, and volunteer activities. A sense of belonging is developed when a person is seen for their individual assets, has positive interactions with others, and is not excluded from participation. Developing and maintaining reciprocal relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances in the community is integral to enhancing a positive image.

In order to educate and build mutually beneficial relationships with the community, DDS, Family Support and Autism Support Centers and other providers must thoughtfully communicate who they are, their mission, and their contributions by providing a professional and skilled image in their interactions in their community and participation in local events. Areas of focus include:

- Community Education – Promoting a positive image through relationships, interactions and being part of the community, and enhancing understanding about the lives and experiences of individuals and families in their local community;
- Community Development/Organizing – Developing partnerships with schools, community agencies and other resources to create new opportunities that support inclusion.

Key Issues to be Addressed:

- Promotion of partnerships between community organizations and families;
- Community perception of individuals with intellectual disability;
- Education of the community about individuals and the needs of families;
- Community connections through service; and
- Vision and commitment of leadership staff in organizations to promote and support community development and partnerships.

Focus Area Five:

Community Education and Partnerships

Goal 1 **Develop multiple public education approaches about individuals with an intellectual disability and their families to promote increased understanding and a positive image that results in more opportunities for meaningful community inclusion and participation.**

Action Steps:

a) Increase public awareness of the mission, values and services offered by local public and private agencies.

b) Promote expectations that state and private agencies use a myriad of approaches to participate in local organizations as an opportunity to promote awareness around the capabilities and contributions of individuals and families, the importance of being an active member of their community, and the needs of families as caregivers. (long-term)

Goal 2 **Develop a strategic focus with family support and other providers to promote community partnerships that build mutual relationships with community organizations and entities to expand opportunities for individuals and families, build linkages, and leverage resources.**

Action Steps:

a) Identify and gather curricula and provide training on best practices and effective strategies for building partnerships and facilitating community development opportunities.

b) Develop a pool of trainers/community experts to be available as a resource to facilitate and assist families, staff and individuals with building community connections {train-the-trainer approach}. (long-term)

Focus Area Six:

Expanding Access to Information, Resources and Supports for Families and Improving Communication Methods through Technology

Families need easy access to timely and current information and resources. This includes information about understanding their child's disability, such as effective interventions, strategies and services as well as public benefits, community and generic resources. Families indicate the need for different types of information at different life stages, especially at key transition points such as the movement from early intervention to public education services or from school to adult services. Having a knowledgeable person with expertise in disability information, benefit programs and generic community supports strengthens their ability to support their family member. Many families describe not knowing what questions to even ask or where to begin.

In making information available, the system needs to be responsive to the needs of families from different cultural and linguistic communities. There is also a need to better use technology to expand ways to provide information.

Focus Area Six:

Expand Access to Information, Resources and Support for Families and Improve Communication Methods through Technology

Goal 1 Improve outreach to families.

Action Steps:

a) Provide information about the resources of the Family Support Centers and contact information to be sent in the mailing to families when their child/adult is found eligible for services.

b) Update and revise the information on family support services on the DDS web-site to provide current information, make it more family-friendly, and easier to navigate.

c) Explore the development of more formal linkages with other list-serves and web-based resources designed for families to provide information, resources and promote parent networking and peer support. (long-term)

d) Promote outreach efforts in local communities that expand access to information and connect with families as an integral function among all family support providers.

e) Encourage use of webinars and other modalities to make training information available to families in more flexible ways. (long-term)

Goal 2 Build capacity and resources among Family Support Centers and providers.

Action Steps:

a) Provide forums at the statewide and regional level for Family Support Centers and other Providers to share information on promising practices and help build knowledge and capacity around supports and resources for families.

b) Explore uses of social media and other methods to promote the exchange of information and resources and build peer networks between agencies and organizations providing resources to families. (long-term)

Expected Outcomes

Progress and successful implementation of the recommended action steps to address identified needs and ideas expressed by families is intended to build capacity among DDS, family support providers and communities and will result in a more comprehensive, coordinated, integrated and responsive system of supports. Families will benefit in some of the following ways:

Improved Access to Information and Resources

- Access to a series of helpful fact sheets and information relevant for different life stages that clearly define services and resources across the lifespan;
- Access to common publications and information related to transition planning, including the DDS booklet, “The Road Forward,” that will be updated;
- Development of comprehensive resource libraries at Family Support and Autism Support Centers including specific information and resources on transition planning;
- Current information about support services for families on the DDS web-site with linkages to other resources, that is easier to navigate and more consumer-friendly;
- Access to more current information about social and recreational opportunities available in local communities, as well as information on initiatives and ‘best practices’ that have created inclusive social and friendship opportunities; and
- Increased ways to identify respite and other skilled workers who can provide supports to individuals and families, especially for families looking for staff with specific expertise.

Enhanced Training Opportunities

- Availability of comprehensive training opportunities through a variety of venues including the Family Support and Autism Support Centers to address interests and need areas that are pertinent to different life stages;
- Improved opportunities for training using more current technology to make them accessible to a wide audience of families, individuals and staff, such as webinars, podcasts, YouTube, etc.;
- Regular training opportunities through DDS area offices and providers on transition planning using standardized topics and curriculum, and access to provider forums and resource fairs;
- Provision of opportunities for core training and ongoing professional development for staff to develop competencies and expertise in different need areas to be more responsive to the varied needs of families and individuals across the lifespan;
- Access to training workshops on the topics of developing friendships, “introduction to friends,” and consultants who can provide “how to” trainings on developing lasting relationships;
- Development of new training opportunities for respite and other in-home support workers;
- Hosting of trainings and information forums for the general public (including hospitals, pediatricians, schools, state, and community agencies to discuss the role of DDS; and
- Development of a pool of trainers/community experts to be available as a resource to facilitate and assist families, staff and individuals with community development (using a train-the-trainer approach).

Increased Consistency in Service Delivery and Practices in Interactions with Families

- Opportunities for families to be engaged in discussions with DDS and provider staff on an ongoing basis regarding planning for their family member's future, and to be made aware of different resources that may be helpful. Use of a common and comprehensive planning tool that will aid in the discussions regarding supports and resources;
- To support good planning, development of a system for regular check-ins by DDS and family support staff with families utilizing a standardized checklist to ensure that families have received and understand pertinent information, requirements, and realities that may be relevant to the age group of their family member, with a particular emphasis during the transition period;
- Surveying families on a regular basis to ensure that relevant trainings are developed and provided;
- More consistency among Family Support and Autism Support Centers regarding the type of trainings offered;
- Identifying, engaging and supporting individuals and family members to help others with the transition processes.
- Ensuring Family Support Centers and Autism Support Centers, in conjunction with Area Offices, review and respond to barriers to families/individuals across their catchment areas to social/recreational activities and events;
- Expansion of community partnerships to build relationships with local organizations, businesses and other entities to develop new opportunities for individuals and families and leverage resources that might be helpful; and
- Providing forums at the statewide and regional level for Family Support Centers and Providers to share information on promising practices and help build knowledge and capacity around supports and resources for families. Exploring uses of social media and other methods for networking and information-sharing.

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Dianne Huggon, Parent/Statewide Family Support Council
Nannette Ohman, Parent; Advocates, Inc/Autism Alliance of Metro-west;
Donna Macleod-Prior- Alternatives Unlimited