

July 22, 2013

Greetings,

I am pleased to announce that I will serve as a new Independent Advocate for Self-Directed services (SDS), presently under the Medicaid New Directions Home and Community Based Services Waiver, but soon under the Community Pathways Waiver. I am thrilled to be working in this new position.

As former Training and Advocacy Coordinator under the New Directions Waiver, I have had the opportunity to work with numerous participants in the waiver, and I look forward to the possibility of working with many new participants going forward under the Community Pathways Waiver.

As a person with a disability who self-directs his life, I know first-hand what it is like to design a personalized plan of support, and it is my belief that all individuals with disabilities and their families should have the option to self-direct their lives. I believe people who Self-Direct should have the necessary supports to lead the lives that they choose.

As Independent Advocate for SDS, I will provide advocacy services to participants in the waiver. Please note that, although I am a contractor for DDA and use office space provided by DDA, I am not an employee of DDA.

My responsibilities as an Independent Advocate include:

1. Providing information, technical assistance, and training on self-direction, self-advocacy, and the availability of advocacy services. In this way, I can help participants understand the process by which they may self-direct services and provide information regarding the services that are and are not covered by the waivers.
2. Providing assistance and instruction on reporting critical incidents.
3. Providing assistance and instruction in creating Individual Plans and self-directed budgets.
4. Providing assistance and instruction regarding annual reviews, modifications to plans and budgets, and helping participants understand State and federal labor laws related to SDS.
5. Providing information regarding the process by which participants may appeal a decision by DDA. I can help explain the process and the rights to an appeal, and provide participants with contact information for available legal aid service organizations.

Please note that under Maryland law, I MUST report any evidence I receive regarding the abuse or neglect of a participant, by immediately informing DDA.

As an Independent Advocate, there are certain services I am not able to provide to participants, including:

1. I cannot provide any other direct support.
2. I cannot serve as a support broker.
3. Although I can assist with the creating of individual plans and budgets, I cannot assist with finding or managing individual participants' supports.
4. Although I can provide information regarding appeal rights, once an appeal is filed, I can no longer provide any services regarding that appeal to the participant.

I am quite interested in learning from participants and their families who are using SDS. I want to learn what is working well and what is not working. Prior to September 1, 2013, I plan to schedule focus groups in at least two regions in Maryland. I will also schedule a teleconference in order to provide individuals receiving SDS an opportunity to participate. I will send out the dates and times for these events in the next few weeks.

Prior to October 1, 2013, I will submit a report to DDA with information gleaned from the focus groups and teleconference, and I will make recommendations regarding changes and improvements from the participants and their families. Your voice is needed, and I encourage you and your family to participate in these events. With this letter is a flyer containing dates and locations for these events.

To make communication easier, I encourage you to provide your e-mail address to me. Your e-mail address will not be shared with anyone else. You can e-mail me at [edward.willard@maryland.gov](mailto:edward.willard@maryland.gov).

Again, I am excited to be working again on behalf of people self-directing their services. Please contact me with questions, concerns, and requests for my support.

Sincerely,

Edward Willard

Independent Advocate for

Self-Directed Services