

Dear Family Member,

I write to ask for your help as AccessCNY and other providers of Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) programs plan the restarting of services in our area.

Agencies like AccessCNY need to follow state OPWDD guidance as we begin to restart programs. We are actively sharing our ideas and concerns with OPWDD, but the voices of families are especially important at this critical moment.

Since mid-March our residential programs have followed OPWDD's strict no visitor policy. This policy was necessary to keep residents and staff safe, especially as those living in congregate living quarters have been among the most impacted by COVID-19. This policy has been exceedingly difficult on both residents and their families.

With New York currently in the beginning process of a phased reopening, OPWDD has shared that residential programs are not part of the phased reopening and that we will receive separate guidance on when restrictions will be lifted.

Similarly, day habilitation programs were shuttered as a result of the pandemic. AccessCNY closed our program due to the state directive, the inability to socially distance and to prevent spread of COVID-19. We await state guidance on what this program will look like in the future.

Both AccessCNY and OPWDD have had to make difficult decisions on when and how to operate programs during this pandemic to ensure the safety of those we serve. As COVID-19 cases decline it's time for families to play a vital role in reopening programs.

To ensure your voices are heard, consider asking OPWDD to:

- Include families and providers early in the planning process.
- Be transparent and communicate openly and honestly with families and provider agencies on where their plans stand currently.
- Consider regional plans as programs begin to reopen.
- Remember, Upstate New York providers operate smaller homes and day programs. These programs should open when safe, but should not have to wait for larger downstate programs to resume. Downstate providers often operate large residential facilities with dozens of residents and day hab programs with hundreds of people.

Please share the above message with the Commission of OPWDD Dr. Theodore Kastner at:
commissioner@opwdd.ny.gov

The health and safety of your family member is our utmost priority, and we welcome your help in planning a safe reopening.

Sincerely,



Paul Joslyn, Executive Director