

## Develop Buy-In Plan – CIP Family Conversation Q&A

### Community Integration: Family Questions & Answers



#### **Q. What is Community Integration?**

**A.** Like all Americans, people with disabilities want to be connected and contributing members of society. Their interests include working, volunteering, learning, socializing, and expressing themselves in creative ways. Seeing a rise in expectations, Federal and State governments have issued new legislation that supports community-based, non-segregated programs. Over the years, society has increasingly embraced people with physical and cognitive challenges. Today, there are more options and opportunities for people with a disability than ever before.

Under controlled and secured conditions, Ability Beyond's Community Integration process helps individuals gradually transition from non-integrated social, activity, and work activities into community-based opportunities that best meet their interests, abilities, and supportive needs.

#### **Q. How do you know that people with disabilities are welcome in the community?**

**A.** For over 50 years, we have seen dramatic improvements in society's acceptance and appreciation of people with disabilities. The more contact with the public through employment, volunteerism and recreation, the more people with disabilities are viewed as valued members of the community, who possess many positive qualities.

#### **Q. Is community-based employment better than sheltered employment?**

**A.** There are more choices and opportunities in the community for individuals with disabilities. In the community, your son/daughter can develop new skills and engage in diverse activities that are enjoyable and stimulating. There's an added benefit, individuals we serve often tell us that when they work or volunteer within a business environment, they feel part of a group. They feel they are contributing in their own way. They feel appreciated and accepted.

**Q. How do you match a person's interests, needs and abilities with community-based activities and opportunities?**

**A.** Using a team approach, and prior to participating in any community-based activity, learn and document each individual's interests, functional abilities, skills, and supportive needs. Family member and guardian participation in this process is very important to be sure we are creating and updating complete and accurate information for the profile. The profile is accessible by members of the team who, in collaboration with family and guardians, identify and plan out the activity schedule. We also maintain a comprehensive information file for each community activity. This allows us to explore and identify appropriate matches. After participation in a new activity, we make notes of how much that activity was enjoyed for future consideration.

**Q. My loved one does well with daily and weekly routines, not frequent changes. How do you accommodate that need?**

**A.** First, we recognize the importance of staff continuity. So, therefore, maintaining the same staff members in each person's life, with as little variation as possible, is a priority. The same is true with activities. By learning as much as we can about an individual, with family and guardian help, we can schedule activities that will be enjoyable and stimulating. If certain work, volunteer, recreation, and social activities are enjoyable, there's no reason to change them. When a person expresses interest in trying something new, we're happy to accommodate.

**Q. What precautions are taken to ensure safety?**

**A.** We use our comprehensive, and continuously evolving, risk management plan to identify and either eliminate or significantly reduce potential safety risks. Our priority is to ensure adequate staff coverage to meet individual needs. We conduct thorough onsite environmental assessments before scheduling any community activities so as to be sure that there is a good match with each individual's physical and cognitive abilities. We conduct intensive staff training. We utilize the latest communication technologies. We are instituting new policies and procedures. And we have emergency response plans.

**Q. How will medical needs be met while in the community?**

**A.** Staffs are certified by the State of Connecticut to administer medications. Each individual will have a specific protocol for medications storage and administration while in the community. Our floating clinical personnel provide professional support when needed. Our advanced communication systems ensure that any questions are answered. Assigned staff can access pertinent information and instructions and we thoroughly document every dose administered.

**Q. How will transportation be provided?**

**A.** We have hired additional dedicated vehicle drivers as well as a new Dispatcher who coordinates all transportation needs. We installed new Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to track the exact location of our vehicles so we can be responsive to on-demand transportation requests. We also introduced a new state-of-the-art computerized transportation scheduling system to ensure responsiveness, dependability, and safety.

**Q. What do you do in the event of a behavior episode?**

**A.** One of the reasons why community integration has become so popular is experience has shown that many individuals with behavior challenges respond very well when exposed to appropriate community-based settings and activities. In general, the frequency of behavior episodes tends to decline after transitioning from non-integrated programs to community-based settings. Environments that are smaller and less distracting, that offer stimulating physical and cognitive activities, tend to be enjoyable and leave people feeling productive and connected to society. Each individual has a written behavior plan and all staffs are fully knowledgeable of the plan. In the event of a behavior episode staff will know what to do to support the individual as well as educate any nearby observers.

**Q. For those who cannot or choose not to participate in Community Integration, what happens to them?**

**A.** It is our goal to have as many individuals as possible engaged in the community as much as possible. The degree to which is based on individual choice, ability and stamina. For those individuals who are very low functioning and/or require considerable health care support, they will still benefit. There will always be supportive environments and programs developed and managed by Ability Beyond within a secured community location. This includes settings where individuals can receive personal support and health services. There will always be a location where individuals can relax, enjoy some quiet time, socialize or engage in stimulating group activities.

**Q. Is Community Integration only for certain individuals who live in certain residential settings?**

**A.** No. Community Integration is not for certain individuals or based on where an individual lives. Rather, Community Integration is based on what an individual wants to do and how Ability Beyond can better serve them.

**Q. Will you have enough staff to run the programs and supervise participants?**

**A.** Adequate staff coverage to meet individual needs and to ensure safety is a high priority. Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Capital Campaign combined with reduced overhead costs provides Ability Beyond with the resources to hire additional program staff. In addition, training and expanding roles allow existing staff to provide support in residential, vocational, and day programs. This enhances staff/individual continuity.

**Q. Why are you selling your building?**

**A.** With programs and individuals transitioning into the community, the need for such a large facility is no longer necessary. We are relocating our administrative offices into another building and using the opportunity to expand our staff training space. The money we save by selling our present 62,000-sq/ft building and buying a 30,000-sq/ft office building can be used for additional personnel to support individuals in our community-based programs.