



Main Story / 08.21.08

OMRDD Home-Buying Program Benefits MRDD Consumers, Families, and Direct Care Staff

AUBURN – The N.Y. State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) has received a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that it is using to advance home ownership for individuals with developmental disabilities, their family members or guardians, and their direct care workers.

Funded by HHS's Assets for Independence program, the grant money is being used by OMRDD to develop the N.Y. State Individual Development Account (IDA) program to help income-eligible individuals with developmental disabilities, their parents or legal guardians, and direct care employees working in state-run or voluntary agencies or facilities with saving money to purchase a home. The key component of the IDA will be a specialized matched savings account, via which OMRDD will match each dollar saved and/or invested towards a home purchase by participants with four dollars. That translates to OMRDD contributing \$4,000 to every \$1,000 raised or saved by participants towards a home purchase down payment, for example. The IDA also allows funds raised or saved and matched to be used to cover homebuyer costs such as appraisals and application fees.

The current program will cover 360 eligible, single individuals and families/households in Onondaga, Oneida, and Oswego and nine other (Niagara, Erie, Chatauqua, Monroe, Chemung, Steuben, Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady) upstate New York counties, says OMRDD spokesman Bob Addis.

“This is a new pilot program that is in addition to the 12 year-old OMRDD program we have had that offers four percent, fixed-rate mortgages with no down payment to qualified developmentally disabled individuals and that was just extended to individuals’ parents in the fall of 2007,” he said. “We are piloting it in 12 designated counties based on data indicating the number of lower-income people who could be helped, those counties’ having the most affordable housing, and those areas in general that could be helped most.”

According to Addis, OMRDD is working with a federal home mortgage consortium of 200 to 300 banks called the First Home Club to soon make an identical opportunity available to individuals with developmental disabilities, their parents or guardians, and direct care workers in all N.Y. State counties, including Cayuga and Tompkins.

OMRDD says eligibility requirements may vary depending on the individual applicant, but stressed the program seeks first-time, income-eligible homebuyers. The minimum time participants must save is six months before making withdrawals from their matched savings accounts, with typical savings plans ranging between 12 and 36 months. Also, says OMRDD, participants in the five-year program need to buy their homes before December 2013.

Direct care employees participating in the program must be either full-time OMRDD employees or working at a voluntary agency and remain employed as such for a minimum of five years.