



Main Story / 11.30.07

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Unity House Expands Cayuga County OPTS IRA Program



OPTS IRA Manager Tammy Hardy

AUBURN – Effective December 1, 2007 Unity House of Cayuga County Inc.’s Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) population of individuals with developmental disabilities in Cayuga County will increase to 31, due to the expansion of its 133 Prospect Pointe Options for People Through Services (OPTS) IRA in Auburn.

The expansion is the result of Unity House requesting in August 2007 an amendment to its original N.Y. State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) five-year OPTS award and contract. Approved in February 2007, the contract took effect in April 2007 when the agency began

housing and supporting female consumers in two apartments at its 133 Prospect Pointe IRA Auburn site. That original OPTS agreement provided Unity House with annual funding in excess of \$300,000 for operational expenses and yearly reimbursements to fund the growth of its Cayuga County IRA population from 26 to 30 individuals.

“We applied with the Central New York Developmental Services Office to pursue an expansion of our original OPTS IRA at Prospect Pointe in Auburn from four consumers in two apartments to five consumers in three apartments,” said Unity House Executive Director Joyce Williams. “Our application to amend was based on our determination that such a reconfiguration would provide a greater opportunity for Unity House to meet the needs and preferences of individuals at the Prospect Pointe IRA and on the New York State Cares II waitlist.”

Williams explained that, at the time of its August 2007 request to amend its OPTS IRA contract and increase its population at Prospect Pointe to five individuals, the agency had just three individuals living at the location, due to a May 2007 vacancy the program incurred. That fourth person vacancy in the agency’s amended OPTS IRA could not be filled until Unity House first met a specific preference of a fifth individual to be placed in a single apartment. The agency’s reconfiguration amendment met this latter need by incorporating the use of an unoccupied single apartment located within the same apartment structure of its original OPTS IRA space proposal, she said.

Unity House’s OPTS IRA expansion to 31 consumers required additional funding to cover start-up, rent, and utility costs generated by occupancy of the single apartment. Williams said OMRDD in Albany approved the funding of these additional expenses, and that that authority’s Bureau of Program Certification (BPC) then authorized occupancy and use of the single apartment space on November 8. That approval and authorization allow Unity House to house and support effective December 1 the fourth Cayuga County consumer in the agency’s two-

apartment space, and to do the same for the fifth county consumer in the single apartment space, per the amended terms of the OPTS IRA.

The agency's staff overseeing the care and needs of the five consumers will remain at six full-time employees, said Prospect Pointe Manager Tammy Hardy.

Begun in 2004, OMRDD designed OPTS to provide a wider array of options to individuals with developmental disabilities who receive services as well as to the public and private nonprofit providers who care for them. Based on integrating consumer services and consumer choice, those options have provided funding mechanisms that strengthen a provider's capacity to deliver individualized services; have improved access to needed services and supports for eligible individuals; and have enhanced consumer and family participation in the available programs and services.