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Collaborative Pilot Project Funded by the Golisano Foundation to Increase Equity and Access in OPWDD's Self-Directed Services

Rochester, NY – August 25, 2023: A collaborative pilot project led by four Rochester Health & Human Services agencies, funded by the Golisano Foundation, and designed to improve access to Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Self-Direction services for minorities, is set to launch its public outreach campaign on August 25th.

Catholic Charities Family and Community Services, Empowering People's Independence (EPI), Ibero-American Action League, and the Urban League of Rochester were awarded a grant from The Golisano Foundation in 2021. Over the past two years, these agencies have worked together to expand knowledge and access to OPWDD's Self-Directed Services in communities of color within the City of Rochester.

OPWDD Self-Direction provides individuals with developmental disabilities and their families with more control in selecting and managing the support and services they receive. Through Self-Direction services, participants can manage their budget and choose when, where, how, and from whom they receive services. Individuals can hire their own staff, set their own schedules, and enroll in community classes to help them achieve their goals. While Self-Direction offers tangible benefits to individuals and their families, the program can be initially intimidating and highly complex to navigate.

"Self-Direction not only empowers people with greater choice and control over the supports they receive but also expands their options beyond traditional programs," said Jeff Sinnebox, EPI President/CEO. "We have noticed a distinct difference between families served in our OPWDD Self-Direction program and those in our OPWDD Traditional programs. Families choosing self-directed services tend to be suburban, Caucasian, and more affluent. With this pilot project, our goal is to identify and address the systematic and individual barriers to accessing Self-Direction services for communities of color."

"We commend EPI's efforts to collaborate with Catholic Charities Community Services, Ibero-American Action League and the Urban League of Rochester to take direct, local action and establish this innovative pilot project," said Erica Dayton, Executive Director of the Golisano Foundation. "The project's focus is much-needed and its thoughtful approach will expand knowledge of and essential access to OPWDD's self-directed services."

“It is the Urban League’s mission to ensure that communities of color have access to important services and resources.” said Dr. Seanelle Hawkins, President & CEO of the Urban League of Rochester, NY. This pilot project and “the Golisano Foundation funding has enabled the Urban League to prioritize self-directed services for the community we serve.”

The collaborative has identified the following major barriers:

- Significant financial and knowledge barriers prevent smaller agencies deeply connected within communities of color from entering the self-directed services space.
- The reimbursement payment model of Self-Directed services can pose a barrier to individuals with lower economic means.
- The majority of service providers have English-only speaking staff.

Through the work of the collaborative, they have been able to add a new provider, Urban League of Rochester, who has deep roots in serving minority and urban communities in Monroe County. Also, both the Self-Directed programs at EPI and Catholic Charities have increased their accessibility to Spanish-language families through hiring Spanish-speaking coordinators and brokers and translating program documentation and training into Spanish. More Spanish-language families are now being served by these programs. In addition, EPI has achieved a 10-percentage point shift in diversity for self-hired staff.

“Reaching marginalized and disenfranchised community members isn’t always easy, but we strive to ensure that we maximize every effort in doing so through collaboration, partnerships, and continued advocacy and outreach such as this invaluable initiative” said Angelia Perez-Delgado, President & CEO of Ibero-American Action League.

“Participating in this project provided Catholic Charities Family and Community Services with increased awareness of community need,” said Lori VanAuken, President & CEO of Catholic Charities Family and Community Services. “It also provided new resources and networks to better support internal operations and the community at large.”

As the collaborative enters its final phase of work, it will launch a public outreach campaign featuring authentic stories from people of color who have achieved success with Self-Directed services, as well as lessons learned from the four-agency collaborative.

Starting mid-August and lasting for a month until mid-September, the campaign will be shared on all four agencies’ social media channels. Insights will be provided by Jeiri Flores, a well-known disability advocate in Rochester, and Melanie Dickson, a mother who found that directing services for her son was the right fit for her family.

Videos and social media posts will be available:

EPI YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@empoweringpeoplesindepende624/>

EPI Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/empoweringpeoplesindependence>

EPI LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/epilepsy-pralid-inc-?trk>

EPI Twitter: https://twitter.com/EPI_NY

EPI IG: https://www.instagram.com/epi_newyork/?hl=en

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About Catholic Charities Family and Community Services: Catholic Charities Family and Community Services provides housing, employment, and coordination of care to help people of all ages and all walks of life live independently with dignity, while facing the challenges of addiction, aging, mental illness, HIV, poverty, developmental disability, and immigration.

For more information about Catholic Charities Family & Community Services, please visit fcscharities.org.

About Empowering People's Independence: EPI provides progressive, tailored care solutions to people with developmental disabilities, epilepsy, and brain injury. Headquartered in Rochester, NY and with offices in Syracuse and Binghamton, EPI provides comprehensive services in the Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, Western and Central New York regions. EPI's offerings include Self-Direction, Day and Community Habilitation, residential services, respite, and Health Homes. EPI's OPWDD Self-Direction program is one of the largest in the area serving over 700 families.

For more information about EPI, please visit epiny.org.

About Ibero-American Action League

Ibero, a dual language multi service agency that uplifts, empowers, and advocates for Latinos and the underserved to achieve equity and become fully valued community members.

For more information about Ibero-American Action League, please visit urbanleaguero.org.

About Urban League of Rochester, N.Y.

The mission of the Urban League of Rochester, NY, is to enable African-Americans, Latinxs, the poor, and other disadvantaged to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights.

For more information about Urban League of Rochester NY, please visit ibero.org.

About the Golisano Foundation

The Golisano Foundation is one of the largest private foundations in the U.S. dedicated to making the world a better place for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Foundation is devoted to opening doors to opportunity, changing negative perceptions and stereotypes, and forging unprecedented partnerships to ensure individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have pathways to personal dignity, independence, and the best possible expression of their abilities and talents throughout their lifetimes. Founded in 1985 by Tom Golisano—entrepreneur, philanthropist, civic leader, and founder of Paychex, Inc.—the Foundation “imagines the possibilities,” advocating for families, fighting for their dignity, and giving people with IDD the opportunity to thrive in their communities. With more than \$60 million in gross assets, it awards

about \$3 million annually to non-profit organizations in Western New York and Southwest Florida.
Visit us at Golisanofoundation.org.