

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, October 20, 2009

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BBI Selected to Co-Lead Implementation of New \$12 Million New York State Medicaid Infrastructure Grant

The New York State Office for Mental Health has selected the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University to co-lead an unprecedented comprehensive research, demonstration and capacity building initiative to advance the employment and economic self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities statewide. The funds have been awarded to New York State by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to build a sustainable and responsive system of services and supports with the cooperation of multiple public systems, the business community, and community based groups that increases opportunities for New Yorkers with disabilities to earn a livable wage and become a part of the economic mainstream.

This statewide initiative will build a shared vision across state agencies and employment stakeholders to enhance the skills and capture the talents and contributions of youth and adults with disabilities to be a part of an inclusive workforce in response to industry needs. Program capacity will be expanded that help people with disabilities obtain jobs, become small business entrepreneurs, take advantage of work incentives and the Medicaid Buy-In program, and plan for a better economic future. The project will offer statewide and regional learning communities an annual employment summit and create new curricula and materials for broad-based dissemination and adoption of promising practices.

Over the two-year period, there is expected to be developed a new level of relationships between employers and the disability community and a new set of expectations about work and economic stability and growth for thousands of individuals with disabilities who want to reduce dependence on government benefits and increase choices in their level and scope of community participation.

BBI Chairman Dr. Peter Blanck notes: "New York State has a tremendous and historic opportunity to improve the almost 70% unemployment rate of New Yorkers with disabilities. BBI is pleased to provide its expertise and leadership under a 2 year/\$2.5 million per year contract to help shape attitudes, knowledge,

policy and practice that demonstrate that having a disability does not mean you cannot have a job, a career, own a business or escape poverty. This project helps fulfill Dr. Blatt's vision of a life in the community for everyone and Syracuse University's commitment to an inclusive society".

The project will be led by BBI's Chief Executive Officer Michael Morris and Managing Director for Program Development Gary Shaheen as Co-Principal Investigators and involve BBI staff from both its Syracuse and Washington D.C. offices as well as a broad array of partners including The Employment and Disability Institute at Cornell University, the Governor's Most Integrated Settings Council Employment Subcommittee, leaders of seven New York State agencies, the Whitman School of Management and other state and community partners.

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