“Stories of Struggles and Successes: A Consumer Based Needs Assessment for the NJCDD”

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities
Andrew Wolanin, Project Director
Joanne Walsh, Co-PI

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities has funded “Stories of Struggles and Successes” which is designed to collaborate with the citizens of New Jersey with developmental disabilities to generate a consumer based needs assessment. Dr. Andrew Wolanin, of Kean’s Doctoral Studies Program, will serve as the project director. Dr. Joanne Walsh, Psychology Department, is the Co-PI of the project.

Over the past decade the fields of psychology, social work, and health care have been shifting focus to enhancing the positive aspects of individuals and utilizing individuals’ strengths to improve their lives rather than focusing purely on decreasing negative outcomes.

A core feature of a strength based approach is to understand individual differences which enhance engagement of services compared to avoidance of services. Provision of services to individuals with developmental disabilities is bi-directional in that the appropriate services need to be available while consumers need to be willing to actually engage in the services. This is a divergent concept from some schools of thought which view people with developmental disabilities as passive recipients of services rather than as true consumers who are able to shape the scope and effectiveness of services that are available.

The goal for this research project is to understand the service needs of individuals with developmental disabilities in various regions of New Jersey while also highlighting the successful services and identifying paths of success of individuals with developmental disabilities.

The methodology to be deployed in this project is referred to as Participatory Action Research (PAR). In the present case, the active participants will be members of specified developmentally disabled groups and their family members who reside throughout New Jersey. Recruitment will occur in community centers, hospitals, in-patient facilities, etc. as outlined by the NJDDC. Cycle 1 of the study will involve 9 group meetings with approximately 6 -12 participants in each group. Cycle 2 will involve teams of participant interviewers conducting between 12 -15 individual interviews. A total of approximately 100-125 interviews will be used for qualitative analysis in conjunction with information gathered from the initial focus groups.