

April 16, 2021



Dear Families & Friends:

As we shared with you last month, Living Resources has begun the slow process of reopening our day and community support programs. While we wish this process was as simple as reopening our doors and letting everyone back into their supportive services, it is not. This pandemic and the governmental regulations that have been thrust upon us and you, as family members, continue to be a little overwhelming. We hope you will continue to be patient as we move forward in the reopening process while following all the regulations and requirements necessary to keep everyone safe and healthy. Some of you have shared your frustration in not being able to receive in person services yet and we want you to know that we hear you. We've been frustrated too.

There are several factors at play in our reopening process. What's particularly heartbreaking and challenging is that while the CDC is relaxing travel and gathering restrictions for people who are vaccinated, congregate settings (i.e. day programs and group homes) are being excluded from these relaxed rules. What does this mean for you and your family member?

- While mass travel on airplanes is now allowed without quarantine, we are still subject to the regulations that only allow a certain number of individuals in a car who do not reside in the same household, **even if everyone is vaccinated**. In order to meet the regulation, we would have to purchase many more vehicles and hire many more staff members. This is why we are still actively providing virtual services to those that are capable of receiving those services.
- Regardless of people being vaccinated, we are also still subject to social distancing limitations in our site-based day programs. This makes it impossible to bring everyone back to complete in person support. We are working hard to make necessary renovations to meet these requirements, and again, we sincerely appreciate your patience as we maneuver these requirements.
- Individuals – even if they are vaccinated – are not allowed to attend day programming if anyone in the household in which they live are placed on quarantine due to a COVID infection or exposure.
- Living Resources is still required by the state to quarantine a home for 14-days if there is an exposure to COVID, **even if all the individuals living there are vaccinated**.

Additionally, in an effort to be completely transparent, these increased regulations during COVID put a tremendous strain on staff members. Following the governmental guidelines means that our staff members are only able to support a limited number of individuals. The bottom line is that we are facing a workforce shortage. We have been actively recruiting caring superheroes to join our team and wish the market was flooded with available applicants but that is not the case. While staffing has always been a challenge, the pandemic along with pandemic unemployment benefits in place, governmental financial assistance, and parents having to assist their children in virtual learning environments, the challenges of finding and keeping good employees is even harder. We have reached out to other OPWDD providers and we are not alone in this search for appropriate staffing, it is widespread. There was an article in the Times Union recently that highlighted that we are not alone in our search for staff members (a copy of the article is attached). While we continue to advertise our employment opportunities and search for new and innovative approaches to locating potential caring staff members, we can always use a helping hand.

**Together, we have shared our woes. NOW, together what can we do?**

**ADVOCATE.** We will continue to advocate for updated regulations that meet the current pandemic environment. If you would like to help advocate, you can try reaching out to the Governor's office and share your concerns about how the continued restrictions – even for vaccinated individuals - impacts the IDD community and the organizations that support them. Governor Cuomo's office can be reached at 518-474-8390 or mail at the NYS Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224, or send an email by visiting: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>


**REFER A POTENTIAL STAFF MEMBER.** Do you know of a caring person who might be a wonderful addition to the Living Resources team? If so, send them our way! The application process can be accessed on our website at [www.livingresources.org](http://www.livingresources.org) or your contact could reach out directly to Lisa Razanousky, HR Department at [lisa.razanousky@livingresources.org](mailto:lisa.razanousky@livingresources.org).

**GET VACCINATED.** As we continue to receive updated guidance and regulations, we believe that vaccinations are a crucial key to moving forward. We continue to encourage all staff members to be vaccinated and also provide them with a financial incentive of two hours of pay and a \$10 Stewart's gift card for each vaccination, and a "Living Resources I'm Vaccinated" mask at the end of their vaccination series. How can you help? As caring individuals and family members, we urge you to do your research and get vaccinated.

**Please remember that we are all LIVING RESOURCES FAMILY! We are in this together, and we appreciate your support and assistance.**

As always, should you have any questions, please reach out to Steve Klein, Associate Executive Director for Program Services at [sklein@livingresources.org](mailto:sklein@livingresources.org) or 518-218-0000 x 4312. You can also contact me at [emartin@livingresources.org](mailto:emartin@livingresources.org) or 518-218-0000 x 5530.

Best regards for your health and safety,



Elizabeth Martin  
Chief Executive Officer

## Upstate New York CEOs say lots of jobs, fewer workers

Rick Karlin – Sunday Times Union, April 11

COLONIE — Pandemic or not, there are plenty of jobs out there for people who want them, say local business executives.

Filling those jobs, though, is an entirely different matter. Just about every business leader we spoke with relayed stories about how hard it's been to fill certain positions even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic made it harder since many women left the workforce to care for their kids as schools closed or went to hybrid models where youngsters were home for a few days each week.

Those comments reflect the overall findings of the Siena College Research Institute's 14th Annual Upstate Business Leaders Survey. Overall, executives were queried on a range of factors including the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on their bottom lines, the state's business climate and what they believe the future may bring.

One area that jumped out though, was the frustration business leaders expressed when it comes to filling job openings with qualified employees. Of the 1036 upstate CEOs interviewed for the poll, only 28 percent say there is an ample supply of local workers appropriately trained, while 61 percent say there isn't.

There are exceptions to the wealth of job, such as the restaurant/hospitality industry where the jobs disappeared along with the market and are just now starting to recover. But in the majority of businesses that have kept running through the pandemic, the challenge of getting employees remains the same regardless of whether its blue or white collar, technical, creative or managerial.

"There are a ton of jobs out there," Heather Tiff, membership executive for the Capital Region Chamber, said of openings she is trying to get businesses including manufacturers to fill. Recently she's been working with Repligen, a Clifton Park maker of medical equipment, and with Hollingsworth-Vose, an industrial papermaker in Greenwich, Washington County. Such manufacturing jobs at a paper plant can start at more than \$20 per hour while in training.

One reason that many of these positions go unfilled, said Tiff, has been the decades-long push by K-12 schools to funnel students directly to college rather than trade schools or apprenticeship programs which have historically been looked down upon.

The reality, though, is many trades such as welding, carpentry, steam fitting or in manufacturing pay more than the jobs that many liberal arts graduates are getting. "There is an extreme shortage of skilled worker because everyone is going to college and getting a degree in a broad area," said Tiff.

"They are all seeing a lack of young people entering the trades," added Jim Reeks, vice president of business development for Sano Rubin Construction Services. "We have an education system in New York that's a silo. They are very poor at working with and understanding what the business community needs," he added.

When there are vacant jobs for say, carpenters or iron workers paying into the six figures, the schools should do more to get youngsters interested in those fields, said Reeks, even if it means their college acceptance rates, which are touted on websites or state surveys, are lower. In some instances there are simply shortages of people with the specific skills with some become more important during the pandemic.

That's been the case with information technology which has become more important as employees have been working from home and communicating with one another over internet-based programs like Zoom.

"COVID only put our industry in a greater need, so we are having trouble finding people because more and more companies need them," wrote Lauren Groff, CEO at Groff Networks, a Troy IT firm. "Demand went up for IT." But others, like Reeks and Tiff, get back to the education that today's workforce is receiving.

"The National Academy of Engineering has known for almost a decade that the positions that the nation needs are going to be blue collar jobs, and yet the school systems (higher education -- not hire education) has done little," writes Craig Cantello, manager of the Edison Tech Center, a Schenectady organization that teaches people about technology and engineering.

“The reservoir of trained employees is directly related to the devolution of the primary and secondary educational agenda in New York State,” added D. Thomas Lloyd, Founding Principal of Adirondack Studios, an Argyle, Washington County firm that builds stage sets, displays, décor and other backdrops for clients ranging from Broadway show producers to theme park operators. “We have a generational void regarding childhood preparation when it comes to civics, culture, creative arts, communications and vocational skills,” wrote Floyd. “The blame for this falls on the shoulders of parents, educators, the general population and politicians equally. We have let ourselves be ‘dumbed down.’ ”

Adirondack Scenery needs people with combinations of vocational, computer design and fine arts skills – or what Lloyd described as creative welders. It’s in a field that combines digital technology with vocations and art skills that is expected to grow as worldwide demand for new forms of entertainment and storytelling continues to increase.

Adding to the challenges has been the pandemic-driven enhancement of unemployment insurance benefits and the \$1,400 stimulus checks given to many Americans. Opinions are split on how that’s impacted the job market, with viewpoints influenced by the industries and pay scales in question. Several have said that these benefits have slowed peoples’ return to work with some viewing it as an extended government-funding vacation period. But others point out that for many lower-wage workers they are getting more on unemployment and with stimulus money than they would by working. Staying home becomes a stark dollars-and-sense decision. “You do not want to go be a dishwasher when you are making \$600 a week,” on unemployment, said Tifft.

Would a higher minimum wage such as the \$15 that is paid in New York City help? It would make work more attractive, but there also are fears it could drive some small businesses out of business or prompt them to cut back on employees or look to automation, said Tifft and others.

“The unemployed found the subsidies helped pay the bills while out of work. There is always a percentage that will use benefits as an excuse not to work but are they the people you want to pursue?,” wrote Rose Miller, president of Pinnacle Human Resources.

For parents, often women, who have stayed home with their children, the choice comes down to more than money. “While some are stating the enhanced unemployment benefits have made it hard to entice people back to work, that has not been our experience with our member businesses. The bigger issue is that many schools do not offer daily in person instruction. We have heard from our businesses that they have lost women who are mothers of school aged children from employment,” wrote Maureen McGuinness, president of the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce.

“The hybrid model requires an adult to be at home with the child assisting with instruction. Another challenge is that in ordinary circumstances retired family members served as the backup care giver. Given the pandemic this population was not able to pinch hit. For these women who were employed and now are not able to work, the additional unemployment benefits and stimulus checks are necessary for the family to make ends meet.”

All of this isn’t to say that there aren’t solutions out there.

Reeks notes that some of the trade unions such as pipefitters and painters are themselves working with local high schools in efforts to educate kids about their options. And Tifft ran through a list of programs to help people enter or re-enter the workforce. She’s working on initiatives to help people get to jobs in remote spots like Washington County, either through shuttle services or assistance in buying cars. Another initiative is looking at reaching young people aging out of the foster care system or those released from prison who want living wage careers.

But disabusing people of the preconceptions about career paths available to them remains key, said Reeks.

“We’ve got to break the silos,” he said.