Statement in Response to the Chauvin Verdict

Issued April 20, 2021: “Late this afternoon, a jury of his peers determined that Derek Chauvin was guilty of murdering George Floyd last May. This was the right verdict. While we wish the verdict meant that the battle against racism and injustice was over and won, we know it doesn’t. There is still so much more work to be done, not just within law enforcement but in every corner of our community including our own. Unfortunately, racism is woven into the fabric and institutions of our country. No single event will rid us of it. Instead, it will require persistent efforts and a constant openness to awareness and learning and changing.

Today’s verdict is one small, but important step in a very long and challenging journey toward our better selves as a country. Today we can take a deep sigh of relief. Tomorrow, the work to make changes will continue.”

Direct Service Professionals persevering through the pandemic

At the heart of Living Resources are the Superhero Direct Support Professionals and the individuals they support. Throughout this pandemic, our Super Heroes masked up and persevered, followed every new regulation thrown their way, continued to give quality care and support, and made lives better by making a difference each day!

Why? Because not only do they provide care, they do CARE. They CARE about providing others with the dignity to live their lives as independently as possible. They CARE about providing others with a home and the support they need to thrive. They simply CARE.

April 3, 2021 To the editor:

I enjoyed the “COVID-19: One Year Later” section last month. Everyone highlighted absolutely deserves our heartfelt applause. I know it’s hard to make sure we recognize every group of people who have been persevering during the pandemic, but I want to give a shout-out to a group missing from the section: Direct support professionals.

According to state data, approximately 120,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely on the support of direct support professionals to live their best lives. Throughout the pandemic, these dedicated direct support professionals continued to show up to their jobs because of how much they care about the people they support. They were heroic in their efforts to protect individuals from becoming infected and care for those who unfortunately did. And they were a bedrock of stability, support and happiness for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a group for whom lockdowns, constant change and uncertainty are especially challenging.

Direct support professionals deserve to be recognized for being the heroes that they are. On behalf of all New Yorkers, I want to say thanks to all of them for their hard work and dedication throughout this pandemic.

Elizabeth Martin - CEO, Living Resources New York
A reporter once asked Jonathan Peterson-Bernhard how long he has been figure skating. Jonathan answered, “About 15 minutes.” Indeed, Jonathan, a young man with autism, has been training for much longer than that. He was introduced to the sport in 2012 when his former recreation coordinator enrolled her residents in a weekly therapeutic skating class. Jonathan had never skated before but picked it up quickly.

He took to it so well that in the spring of 2016, his coach invited him to train for competition in the 2017 Special Olympics New York State Winter Games, held in Poughkeepsie. Not only did he compete, Jonathan was selected out of 1,000 athletes to run the last leg of the Law Enforcement Torch Run to light the Cauldron to begin the Winter Games.

His family was initially concerned about how Jonathan would react to the lights, loud music, crowd, and cheering of competition. They quickly discovered there was no need to worry, he was a born performer. His mother Karla said, “When he steps out on the ice his face lights up and it’s sheer joy!” In Jonathan’s words, “I just love to boogie!” Overall, Jonathan has earned three gold medals and one silver medal performing to songs such as; “Uptown Funk” by Bruno Mars, “Let’s Groove” by Earth, Wind and Fire, and “American Bandstand.”

When Jonathan was accepted into Living Resources’ Day Community Opportunities Program (DCOP) last year, the Coronavirus was just starting to impact the region. Due to COVID regulations, his residence stopped allowing home visits. Although it was a necessary policy, his family felt that Jonathan wouldn’t understand it. Karla said, “he would have felt like we abandoned him.” It also would have stopped Jonathan’s skating classes which would have been damaging to his emotional wellbeing. As an athlete with Autism who lives to skate, the need for consistency and routine was critical. Karla decided to bring him home to live permanently so he could continue his training, but she knew she would need help.

As his DCOP manager Heather Henderson puts it, “Ulster was creating our Zoom Room and we assured Karla that we would assist her with keeping his routine as normal as possible. We worked together to use consistent language when discussing any needed changes with him. I let Karla know that we were there to support Jonny and the family any way we could!” Karla said, “Living Resources staff has been supportive of Jonathan through all of his transitions. The staff genuinely care about Jonathan, challenge him, and support him. We are truly grateful for all you do for my son and our family. We are so blessed to be a part of the Ulster County Program.”

Jonathan has blossomed and is now thriving at home. His DCOP team noticed that he has become very social, offering insights and engaging in conversations with his peers. He has shared many stories about his training and Special Olympics’ adventures. This has inspired the group to look into working with the Special Olympics in the future. Many of his friends have expressed interest in track and field and swimming competitions.
Creatively Carving Careers

Jake works at the Law Firm of Solomon and Solomon P.C. a few days a week, assisting with data entry, scanning and copying. It’s a position that he enjoys and he wishes he could do more, but his hours have decreased since the beginning of the pandemic. It’s not always easy to find the perfect employment to fit each job seeker, particularly one year into a global pandemic. While Jake is waiting for more permanent work to come his way, he is spending his time adapting the skills he already has and learning new ones. Our career counselors analyze work duties performed in a given job and identify specific tasks that match an individual’s skill set to create a job opportunity. This is known as job carving.

With advocacy from his career counselor Kendra Cunningham, Jake began the year 2021 at Living Resources, making packages of personal protective equipment. He placed ten surgical masks and packages of towelettes and alcohol wipes in Ziploc bags. He also filled hand sanitizer bottles for our staff to use. Jake said he loved this job, but it was only a short term project.

Since Jake loves being a part of the Living Resources family and helping the agency in any capacity, Kendra continued to advocate on Jake’s behalf, networking within Living Resources and analyzing job tasks that match Jake’s skills and interests. Brittany Carmel in our Quality Assurance department had a data processing job which seemed right up Jake’s alley. Kendra discussed the project with Jake and through shared computer screens was able to show him exactly what needed to be done. Jake’s eyes lit up right away. He was very excited to take on the job, but there was only one concern. Due to COVID, our main office was limiting the amount of people in the office, so the project would have to be done remotely. This made Jake a bit more hesitant but Kendra assured him that she would find a creative way to support him without coming to the house.

The team got together to work some magic. Brittany scanned all the needed information to Kendra. Kendra printed everything out and brought it to Jake’s home with a Living Resources computer. Then, using Zoom technology and Google Docs, they worked together to create a process for completing the task. Jake was able to work at his own pace in his home, and Kendra could monitor his work without hovering over his shoulder. Jake said, “I felt really excellent about that. It’s challenging, but not too challenging. I know what to do and am really independent about it. It feels wonderful to know that if I need help, I can ask Kendra to help me.” Kendra added, “It really fostered a sense of independence for him and he really loves the work.” That is the beauty of job carving and our employment specialists are experts at it!
Celebrating Earth Day!

The participants of our Day Community Art Program’s Creative Writing Group met weekly at the Pine Grove Methodist Church prior to the pandemic, and although meeting in person ceased, they continue sharing writing prompts and support online. Writing has been an important tool used by the participants to help get through the pandemic. They particularly enjoyed sharing their thoughts about Earth Day!

“If the Earth could talk it would say that we should take better care of it so that it doesn’t get upset or abused. It should be treated how we like to be treated.

My favorite springtime activities are going fishing and walking my dog. We all should find an eco-friendly way of getting from point a to point b without using cars or other unhealthy transportation. I walk home from work instead of getting a ride in a car. There should be a ban on smoking cigarettes that adds to our unhealthy atmosphere.

We should have more drinking cups and utensils made from corn. We also should cut down the water we waste, and we should use things that are more eco-friendly. We should all switch to solar panels for electricity. We have to cut down at least 17 trees in order to make toilet paper and that is not a suitable habit. We should instead use eco-friendly ones.”

~ Vinique Genre

“Earth Day is very important to the earth because trees give off oxygen. Personally I enjoy the springtime and being outside, in general. My favorite outdoor activity is hiking. I love going to different trails to hike, and I disagree with littering because it’s not good for the earth.

Being outside is helpful for those who are struggling because it gives a distraction to what is stressful to a person. I’d rather be outside than being inside. Yesterday I walked by a tree that had flowers that blossomed. The last time I walked by that tree they didn’t blossom yet.

Flowers in general are beautiful. I actually studied flowers in high school. Although I don’t have a legit favorite flower, it’s because I enjoy them all equally. Each flower is different, but did you know that some only come around yearly? Some can last in the wintertime. Some even come from European countries.

Tulips have a fragile stem that breaks very easily. You’re probably thinking, “Whoa! I didn’t know that.” I truly paid attention during my floral design class, although I didn’t make a career out of it.

I purely enjoy nature itself. Nature isn’t something to take advantage of because we’re lucky we have clear air and beautiful nature. Not everyone is lucky enough to have clear air where they live.

I think we should all take better care of the earth.”

~ Danielle Livingston

“In eighth grade we had a Garden Club that we would help plant and water the flowers. Every Tuesday and Thursday we would meet out by the barn to get the supplies to plant seeds and flowers. I liked doing this because I knew I was helping the community out by doing things in the garden at school. I was with my Aunt Tabby, and we planted seeds of vegetables.

I love helping the Earth by reusing the same water bottle. I recycle to help the animals in the ocean. I am very helpful when it comes to Earth Day by picking up the trash and using less water. Use less lights when you don’t need them.”

~ Stephanie Myers

“Earth Day should not just be on April 22nd. It should surely be embraced every single day of the year.

One day of society doing the right thing with planting trees and picking up litter is just not enough. Some things are making a turn for the better, and it makes me smile. Many restaurants have stopped putting straws in beverages without our permission. There is less Styrofoam. Furthermore, plastic bags seem to be a thing of the past within New York State at supermarkets. But one day is surely not nearly enough.

In my fantasy world, everything that could not be reduced, reused, and recycled would be banned. Anything that could not be converted into its former product after use would at least find its way to another useful purpose. People could be paid to use exercise bicycles that would power generators that would light entire cities. All vehicles would be either hybrid or electric in their function.

One of the ‘glass-is-half-full’ effects of the pandemic is that there is far less pollution. Dolphins have returned to the once-polluted canals of Venice and people are able to see the mountains without the haze of smog. We have seen what happens when the world is allowed to heal itself and perhaps this will be enough motivation going forward!”

~ Jesse Saperstein
Earth Day Every Day

Debbie Duell and Mary Vandyke of the Saratoga Day Community Opportunities Program went on an adventure to the check out our new volunteer site Patroon Land Farm in Voorheesville! The 162-acre farm grows large quantities of high-quality vegetables that supply the Food Bank and 1,000 partnering agencies in 23 counties with diverse, fresh produce to people in need.

Moving forward, the volunteer responsibilities will be to help with planting, transplanting, watering and harvesting the farm’s crops.

The ladies had a wonderful time learning about the different vegetation and were able to get their hands on the onion beds to trim them up to get them ready to plant!!

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