SHARING THE JOURNEY

MARCH 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Elizabeth Martin

This month, we celebrate Developmental Disability Awareness Month, a time to fight stigma and uplift individuals who flourish in spite of life's challenges. One of the many ways we promote these fundamental goals is by fiercely advocating for adequate and equitable funding for agencies like ours in the state budget.

This issue is too important to mince words, so I won't. New York faces an impending human rights crisis and while the current Legislative One House proposals do more than Governor Hochul's proposed budget, they do not go nearly far enough. It is imperative that the FY 2024/25 Budget include both an unrestricted 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment and a $4,000 Direct Support Wage Enhancement.

While direct-support professionals never got rich off their earnings, there was once a time when they earned closer to a living wage. For providers throughout the Capital Region, starting pay is barely above the minimum wage and average staff vacancy rates are alarmingly close to 20%. The consequences of this workforce shortage could be incredibly dire. You can read my full thoughts in **an editorial I wrote that was published in The Times Union a few weeks ago.**

As the budget deadline approaches, our window to take action is quickly closing. I have been in direct contact with Senators and Assemblymembers, urging them to fully recognize and reconcile the impact inflation and years of underfunding have had on our service sector. Living Resources staff members and supported individuals have also been hard at work, attending rallies and visiting the Capitol to speak with lawmakers in-person to share in their own words why this support is vital. Every single voice helps in this fight. If you haven't already, I urge you to pick up the phone and call your representatives. The more people get involved, the more likely our message will be taken as seriously as it needs to be.

NEW YORK DISABILITY ADVOCATES
Life. Supported.

JOIN US FOR A RALLY IN ALBANY!

April 3, 2024 at 11:00 A.M.
The Well of the Legislative Office Building
198 State Street

Show your support by wearing orange!

3rd Annual
A Tribute to Transforming Lives

A Day at the 1863 Club
Saratoga Race Course

Save the Date
Sunday, August 18, 2024

Presenting Sponsor

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WE NEED MORE THAN LUCK!

With a spring in their step and chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil in hand, groups from our Day Community Opportunities Program (DCOP) traveled around the New York State Capitol and Legislative Office Building on March 12, 2024.

They had an important St. Patrick's Day-themed message to send to our lawmakers: "We need more than luck... we need your support!"

We are calling for Governor Kathy Hochul and our representatives in the Senate and Assembly to prioritize an unrestricted 3.2% Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) and the Direct Support Wage Enhancement in the final version of the State Budget. This funding is necessary for all agencies that support individuals with disabilities as we fight to keep up with inflationary operating expenses across the board and seek to pay our direct support professionals (DSPs) a living wage, so that staffing challenges can be alleviated and compensation better reflects the skilled care that they provide. Negotiations and the need for advocacy are far from finished!

"Caring for people with disabilities is a complex undertaking, with DSPs being one of many essential components," reads a statement from New York Disability Advocates, "Inflation has hit every part of our organizations – transportation, clerical, maintenance, quality assurance, and other operating costs have skyrocketed at a pace that has exceeded the state's investment in the system. A restricted COLA ignores this reality and will ultimately be harmful to nonprofit providers, their staff, and – most importantly – the people with disabilities that we support."

The DCOP groups went from office to office, handing each lawmaker or their staff member a coin and a postcard with information printed on it. When offices were empty, the postcards were left in mailboxes by the door. Living Resources CEO Elizabeth Martin was on hand, joining several of the groups on their routes. Some of the individuals were fortunate enough to meet, speak with, and pose for a photo with Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senator Jessica Ramos!

With each conversation, the DCOP participants grew more confident speaking about why their program is so important to them and why lawmakers should show their support. We are thankful that they had the confidence and the passion to make their voices heard!

Half a Century of Impact: A Golden Jubilee

Friday, June 21, 2024
5:30 PM
300 Washington Ave. Ext.
Albany, NY

Fifty

We are looking for sponsors! Click or scan here to learn more.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS EQUAL EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES

Community connections are paying off for our Day Community Opportunities Program (DCOP) in Westchester and Rockland Counties with fun experiences and the chance to give back to those in need.

The kitchen at the Ronald McDonald House of the Greater Hudson Valley (RMHGHV) is open to our program participants from noon to 2 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays. All of the desserts that they whip up stay at the charity, to be enjoyed by the families staying there, who have children receiving life-saving care at Westchester Medical Center. It's a win-win situation. DCOP participants get to enjoy the baking process and the satisfaction that comes with volunteer service. RMHGHV gets to present homemade treats to their guests, who are likely far away from their own homes.

"They love it," shares Donna King, Qualified Intellectual Disability Professional (QIDP) Supervisor for South Day Services, "It's a really good thing. The individuals get excited, since they know what they are going to make ahead of time. We bake so much that we've even stayed past two before."

"We are incredibly grateful for the delicious, sweet treats that Living Resources volunteers bake for our families here at the House," says Ashlyn Hay, Events and Volunteer Manager at RMHGHV, "It is inspiring to see how dedicated and involved the volunteers are in supporting our mission."

Both DCOP and RMHGHV pitch in ingredients and other supplies to make this possible. Donna hopes that as the partnership grows, DCOP participants will be able to do even more activities to support the charity in the future, including shopping and preparing holiday decorations.

After spending part of their week creating in the kitchen, participants are thrilled to also experience the joy of stepping onto the dance floor! Dream Dance Studio has designed a class specifically for DCOP, happening every Thursday at 1 p.m. A big thanks goes to studio director Brandon Whyte, whose passion for dance comes with purpose and a commitment to his local community.

Brandon explains, "Our Slogan is 'Dream to Achieve the Unthinkable.' That slogan of ours says everything... we want all people that walk into these doors to reach their full potential in what they love. Our way of expressing that is through dance." At the end of the season, dance class participants will be invited to take part in a large studio-wide recital, complete with music, costumes, choreography, and a cheering audience.

VISIBILITY AND ADVOCACY DURING BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

Individuals from across New York State who survived a traumatic brain injury gathered with their families, caregivers, and other advocates inside the Legislative Office Building in Albany for a day of visibility and action.

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month and those at the rally organized by The Brain Injury Association of New York State, showed up and spoke out! Living Resources was well-represented, with more than 20 members seated in the front three rows.

After several lawmakers came to the podium, affirming their commitment to the Brain Injury community, participants in our Structured Day Program got up in front of the crowd to sing along with Cristabelle Braden's emotional and awareness-raising song "Different Kind of Warrior." **You can watch the full performance on our Facebook page by clicking here.**

Caleb Brunick, a participant in our Brain Injury Program, was one of those speakers. Back in 2021, while Caleb was pursuing his education in Estonia, a vehicle he was traveling in was involved in a serious crash. It collided head-on with a tractor trailer that had jackknifed. Caleb was in a coma and on life support for one month and remained in the hospital for another three months after he regained consciousness. He endured multiple surgeries and the amputation of his finger. Through medical treatment and intensive speech and physical therapy, he went from being unable to breathe, speak, or walk on his own to now being able to independently walk to the podium, stand behind it, and deliver a speech with eloquence and emotion.

"I attribute my subsequent achievements to an unwavering resolve. This resolve has propelled me to not be defined by that harrowing night, but to emerge stronger, both physically and mentally," shared Caleb in his speech, "My philosophy is rooted in the belief that overcoming adversities, regardless of their nature, is a testament to human resilience and determination."

Caleb successfully completed his Bachelor's degree and says his focus is now on continued recuperation and advocacy. He wants to be a voice for those who have been silenced by their circumstances. He offered thanks to the medical professionals who have helped him on his journey and to his family, particularly his grandmother, mother and partner Elizabeth, who have stood by his side with unwavering support and love.

Caleb ended his speech with these inspiring words:
"One day I will be able to do it all. It's rough, but I can't do anything about it but work hard, hope, and keep strong. Keep faith in your heart!"

CREATIVITY ON DISPLAY

It was the opening day of our newest art installation, and the excitement was palpable. Each new art show is thrilling, but this one was unique. As Roxanne Storms, Art Instructor for our Structured Day Program said, “The participants of the Brain Injury Program have been in group art shows before, but this is the very first time we are having a show for only the ABI program.”

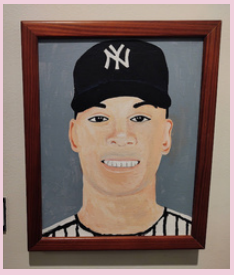
It started with a desire to showcase the creativity of the photography and technology group led by Amanda Deere and Tom Reagan but grew to include a wide variety of art, including painting, pencil sketches, sculptures, jewelry, and more.

The artists in attendance excitedly shared their moment of glory with friends, family, and each other. While some were assisted by walkers or wheel chairs, it seemed they were all dancing on air.

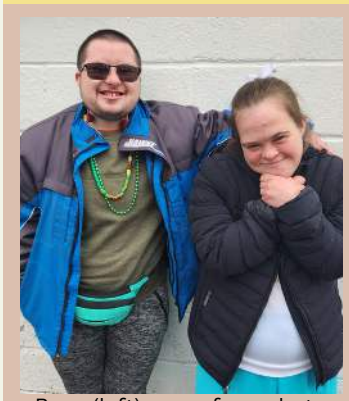
Jorelle said the show made her feel important because she felt appreciated for what she does.

Glen agreed, saying, “It’s great that we get the recognition that we deserve.” Jim added, “It’s kind of surreal in a way. It’s as if my art has come full circle.” Victoria basked in the moment and looked toward the future saying, “I feel wonderful about this because we have never had anything like this. I can’t wait until our next show!

We invite you to stop by the Living Resources Art Gallery, located within our headquarters at 300 Washington Avenue Ext., Albany to view this wonderful exhibit on display throughout the month of April. Our hours of operation are 8:30 am – 4:00 pm.



CELEBRATING DOWN SYNDROME DAY THROUGH FUN AND FRIENDSHIP



Bean (left) poses for a photo with his friend of four years Beth (right).

Each year on March 21, communities around the world celebrate individuals with Down Syndrome and raise their voices to increase awareness and combat stereotypes.

Bean is 25 years old and he participates in our Rensselaer County Day Community Opportunities Program where he cherishes all of the friendships he's made. His outgoing nature and exuberance spreads to everyone around him. He's always among the first people to introduce himself to someone new and advocate for his friends.

When asked what makes Down Syndrome Day special to him, he exclaims, "It's about community and opportunity! Differences make things a lot better!"

On World Down Syndrome Day, we rocked our colorful, mix-matched, and patterned socks around the office to raise awareness!

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY!

Our Brain Injury Structured Day Program celebrated the luck o' the Irish in style! A potluck meal, featuring a traditional feast of corned beef and cabbage (and fish for those observing lent), was served up by our hard-working staff, while program participants brought in desserts to share. The celebration was perfectly on theme, with the color green everywhere from the outfits to the punch that everyone enjoyed! While party-goers sampled the festive fare, they socialized, played games, and, most importantly, spent quality time together as a group.

Students in a College Experience cooking class celebrated St. Patrick's Day by decorating some delicious cupcakes!

SHAM-ROCK AND ROLL AT THE CLIFTON PARK ELKS

Our Day Community Opportunities Program (DCOP) participants recently got their party on at the Clifton Park Elks, celebrating St. Patrick's Day and amazing friendship.

Living Resources DCOP and the Elks are truly kindred spirits. DCOP was started over 40 years ago after individuals in our Day Habilitation program expressed a desire to more fully experience the communities around them. From these beginnings, we formed an environment that fosters community inclusion, self-sufficiency, and self-advocacy through volunteerism, education, and enrichment activities.

Bob Lumpkins, Elks Trustee and Chairperson of Community Project & Activities. who known as "Lumpy" to his friends, said that service is something that the two groups have in common. The Elks are a benevolent organization that seeks out service opportunities within their community. A few years ago, Living Resources staff requested to establish the Elks Lodge as a volunteer site for our DCOP participants and a friendship was born. Teams began regularly arriving at the Lodge to do service activities such as setting up the banquet room for parties and events, and keeping the venue clean. In this way, they established a meaningful place in the Elks community.

Last year, the Elks decided to show their appreciation by throwing a Valentine's Day celebration and making a donation to the agency. This was such a great time, that they repeated the event this year, with a St. Patrick's Day theme. Staff and participants enjoyed a lunch time meal of corned beef and cabbage with carrots, potatoes, and salad, as well as some baked ziti, because, why not? After their appetites were satisfied, they danced the afternoon away.

As kindred spirits, not only did the Elks host the party free of charge, their Exalted Ruler, Kevin Bobbit presented Living Resources a check for $1,800, sponsored through the Elk's National Foundation grant. This generous donation will be used for our program participants to enjoy future activities.

Frank Prevratil, Living Resources' Director of Day Services said, "I feel blessed that the Elks embraced us. From the the bottom of my heart, on behalf of Living Resources, I thank you for everything you do for us."

As the celebration came to a close, friends hugged each other and said goodbye, heading into their respective directions. As they did so, it seemed like the leprechauns whispered the old Irish proverb, "There are good ships and there are wood ships, the ships that sail the sea. But the best ships are friendships, and may they ever be."

LIVING RESOURCES

Thank you for Sharing The Love

Amazing Grace Transportation
Louisa Lombardo and James Dillon
William M. Harris and Holly Katz
Kathleen Quinn and James R. Lortsher
Anthony, Maria, and Stephen Principe
Sandra and James Young

We appreciate everyone who contributed to our Valentine's Day fundraising campaign! The names of additional donors are listed in our February newsletter.

Stewart's Holiday Match
Let Us Double Your Gift
Living Resources ARTS

Thank you Stewart's Shops and its customers for supporting our Arts Program with a Holiday Match grant!

SCHOOL BREAK ADVENTURES

During February break, fun was the name of the game for our Adventure Program! With no school during the week of President's Day, nearly a dozen students came together under the guidance of Living Resources staff for lots of enriching activities out in the community.

First, students worked up a sweat and got their hearts pumping at Skyzone Trampoline Park and yoga class at Wellnest Studios. They got to laugh, play, and socialize while challenging their flexibility and stamina.

Next, it was off to ViaPort Rotterdam to make memories at Via Aquarium and The Local's 3D black light Mini Golf and laser tag courses. The illuminated characters were a huge hit along with the interactive exhibits at the aquarium, which allowed students to experience ocean life up close.

The excursions didn't end there. As the week continued, the group went bowling and traveled to Lake George to enjoy all that The Great Escape Lodge's Indoor Water Park had to offer, including a dance party with Timbertown mascots.

Bring on the Spectrum (BOTS) in Albany also opened its doors to the group and the sensory gym was captivating! Its swings, slides, and other activities kept students entertained for hours. Classes, events, and spaces at BOTS are focused on creating inclusive spaces for both neurodiverse and neurotypical teens and adults.

Finally, after a long and exciting week, the group had one last get-together before returning to the classroom. Our Albany office's cafetorium played host to a pajama party, complete with pancakes, a movie, and a paint and sip activity.

Click HERE to read February's Newsletter