



**March 31, 2015** marks the end of one era and the beginning of a new chapter as OPWDD officially closes the Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center (O.D. Heck) in Schenectady. The planned closing of Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center (O.D. Heck) in Schenectady is the first in the latest series of four scheduled closures announced in 2013 by OPWDD.

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## A Message from the Acting Commissioner

The beginning of 2015 has been a whirlwind of exciting new developments, including a new budget proposal from the Governor that provides a 3.1 percent spending increase to support individuals with developmental disabilities in the most appropriate community settings.

In January, I announced the formation of a Transformation Panel, as outlined on page 8 of this newsletter, which will help us navigate the challenges we face with implementing the Transformation Agenda.

In May, we will be meeting with sheltered workshop providers, individuals and families to collaborate on how workshops can change into integrated business models and how individuals now working in sheltered workshops can find competitive employment in the community. While we recognize that there is no one-size fits all solution to helping

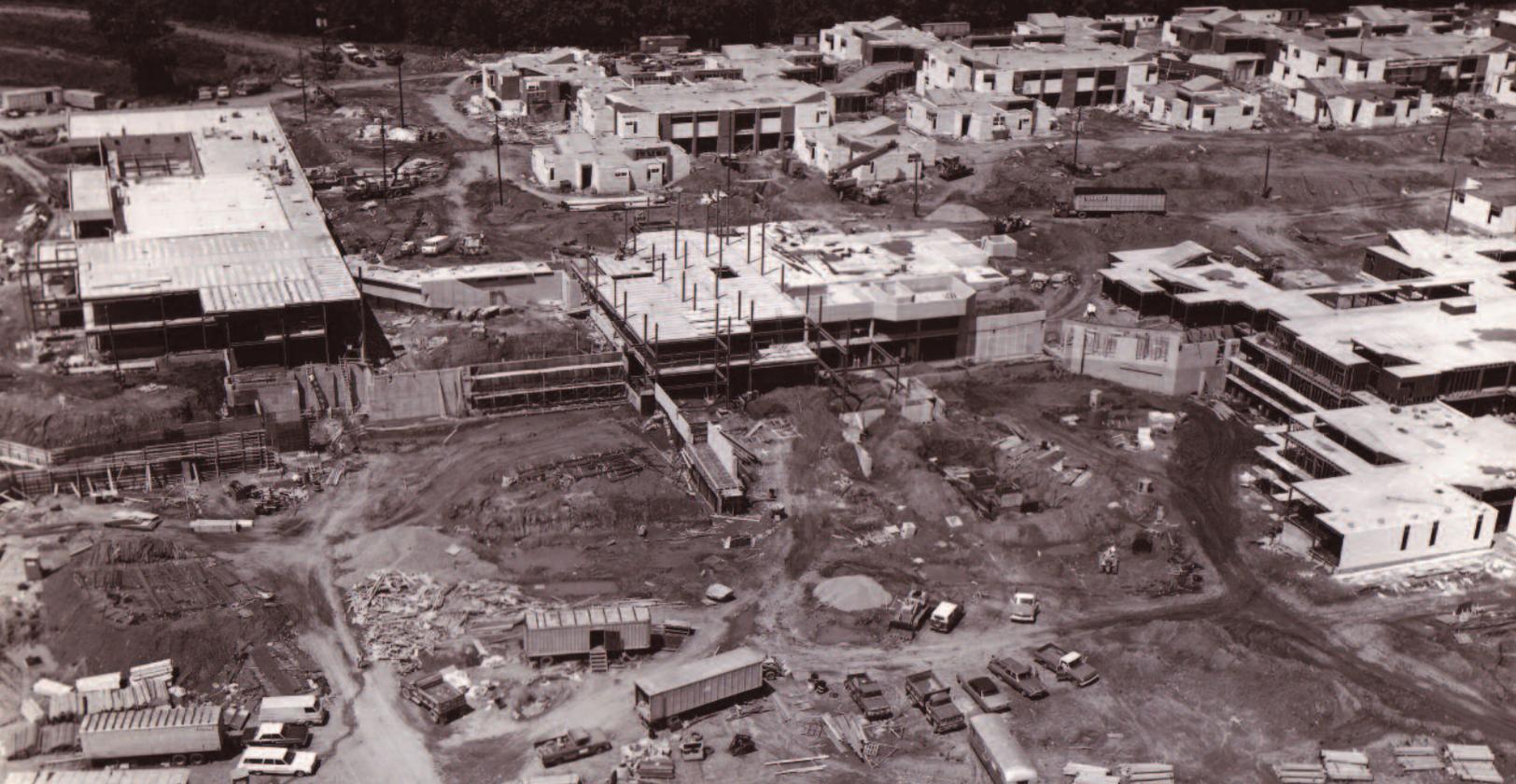
individuals meet their employment goals, we hope that with an interactive partnership we can work on solutions to meet our mutual goals of finding the best, integrated opportunities for every individual with a disability that works with federal law and respects each individual's needs and choices.

It has been a busy start to the year, but we know that the steps we are taking to work with each of you to develop clear, thoughtful and cohesive plans will ensure continued supports and services that respect the true wants and needs of individuals well into the future. ■



Kerry A. Delaney  
Acting Commissioner

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# End of An Era



March 31, 2015 marks the end of one era and the beginning of a new chapter as OPWDD officially closes the Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center (O.D. Heck) in Schenectady. The planned closing of Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center (O.D. Heck) in Schenectady is the first in the latest series of four scheduled closures announced in 2013 by OPWDD.

At the time of the announcement, 48 individuals with developmental disabilities resided at O.D. Heck. Today, they have successfully moved to smaller homes within the community. The approximately 150 employees who supported them remain employed with the agency. The closures of developmental centers in New York demonstrate OPWDD's continued commitment to integrating individuals with developmental disabilities into the

community with the appropriate supports and services.

Sixteen years after the Olmstead Decision to move people with developmental disabilities out of institutional settings and into the "most integrated settings possible," OPWDD has closed 17 facilities with





for specialized treatment by 2017. .

Built in 1975, O.D. Heck was first known as Eleanor Roosevelt Developmental Services. Later, the center’s name was changed to honor Oswald D. Heck, the longest serving speaker of the New York State Assembly who was from Schenectady and served for 22 years until his death in 1959.

O.D. Heck has been a presence in the Schenectady community for more than 40 years and has provided services and supports to thousands of individuals, both adults and children, as well as provided employment and other supports to the area. At its highest occupancy during the late 1980’s, there were 380

individuals in residence. Since then, the population has continued to decline as many individuals transitioned into community living.

As closing day approaches, we would like to recognize the contributions of the dedicated staff and the support of families of individuals at O.D. Heck over the years. While the closure is bittersweet for many, it is the need for positive change that pushes us forward to continue increasing our range of opportunities for the individuals that we serve so they can live richer, fuller lives in their community. ■

the closure of O.D. Heck at the end of this month and continues with its goal of closing three more. OPWDD has reduced its institutional capacity from a high of over 27,000 to less than 500 today, with a goal of approximately 150 individuals remaining in an institutional setting

community for more than 40 years and has provided services and supports to thousands of individuals, both adults and children, as well as provided employment and other supports to the area. At its highest occupancy during the late 1980’s, there were 380



## Transition from O.D. Heck



JoanMarie first came to O.D.Heck in 1985, after brief stays at the former Marcy State Hospital’s Crane Hill School and at the former Rome Developmental Center. When it was announced that the O.D. Heck Developmental Center would close, Joanne DeRocco couldn’t help but worry whether there would be a suitable place for her daughter, JoanMarie, fearing “no one would want my daughter.”

JoanMarie, 49, has autism, is non-

verbal and communicates through about 500 signs she has learned, and faces significant behavioral challenges. And like many, JoanMarie thrives on consistency and routine.

The DeRocco family looked at several residential options for JoanMarie, but none seemed to fit until someone recommended they consider AIM Services. JoanMarie moved into a residence supported by AIM Services in Galway, NY on February 20, 2015. Although there were concerns at first – JoanMarie kept her coat on for two days

when she first moved, and would get up in the night – staff at this home were attentive and supportive, sitting with her and having tea and toast when she couldn’t sleep. They have taken the time to get to know JoanMarie, and plan to continue to support her in the activities she enjoys including participation at the Carriage House Art Center, and they plan to introduce her to new activities.

“We were impressed that the agency admitted to us that they will make mistakes, but will work with us and with her to do what’s best for JoanMarie. They reassured us and told us we can call them at any time. AIM has stepped out of the box to continue JoanMarie’s routine which is important to her and to help her explore new ventures when she is ready.”

JoanMarie appears to be comfortable now where she lives with three others in a home that was built for them. Each person has their own bedroom, and share two baths, a living room, kitchen, and quiet room. “We are proud of JoanMarie. To see her accomplishments – wow! We are so pleased.”



# Super My Life With Autism



*April is Autism Awareness Month. Autism affects one in 68 children, according to the National Autism Association, and boys are four times more likely to have autism than girls.*

Many of us have been inspired by superheroes while growing up. Jeremiah Iheoma of Farmington took this concept to a new level, portraying himself as a superhero to help others understand that living with autism can be a good thing. He said, "It helps you become a good person and it helps you to be good with your brain."

"My Super Life With Autism" is a children's book written, illustrated, and self-published by the fifth grader who attends Canandaigua Primary Elementary School. In his introduction, Jeremiah writes, "Hi, my name is Jeremiah and I have Asperger's which is a form of autism. This book is to help you understand some of the

'superpowers' I have, as well as some of the struggles I face in dealing with autism..."

"One of the 'superpowers' I have is that I have a very good memory...Another thing I am really good at is music, rhythm and dance...Like with everyone else, I have strengths and weaknesses. One thing I struggle with is when I get wound up it is hard for me to calm down by myself... I am a very smart boy with a pretty high IQ. It [Asperger's] just means my mind works differently than others..."

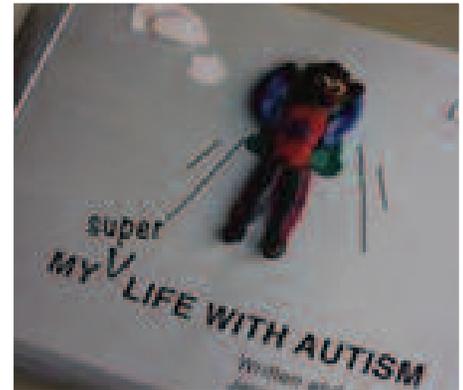
Jeremiah, who was inspired by two young friends who also wrote books, felt his book could be used to show that autism is a gift. Jeremiah decided to use Claymation to illustrate his book, with the central figure being a superhero with a cape and a smile who faces challenges and overcomes obstacles. He said that the most difficult part of writing the book was "choosing the right kind of art" for the illustrations. Once that difficult decision was made, however, he said that creating the illustrations was the easiest part. His mother, Lisa Peck, a Recreational Therapist at DDSOO 1 in the Finger Lakes, said it took Jeremiah about one year to complete the project.

In recognition of his accomplishment, the Wood Library held a book signing in February. Jeremiah was featured on 13 WHAM/FOX Good Morning, a Rochester morning news program. [Jeremiah has a Facebook page \(https://www.facebook.com/iheomabooks \) and a website](#)



([www.iheomabooks.com](http://www.iheomabooks.com)) where the book can be purchased for \$10 plus tax and shipping. Jeremiah plans to use the proceeds of his book to help pay for his college education.

Jeremiah has enjoyed writing and said this process has really helped



him realize that writing is another important part of him. One page in the book features how famous people who have autism have changed the world. Jeremiah feels that he, too, can change the world through his writing. He plans to continue writing and is considering writing about sports next. ■

# \$65.3 Million in Transformation Funds Awarded to 106 Organizations

Last month, the OPWDD announced the award of \$65.3 million in Balancing Incentives Program (BIP) Transformation Funds to 106 organizations for a variety of initiatives supporting our system's transformation. The projects stemming from these awards are designed to advance our system's transformational goals of supporting people to live in the most integrated community settings, obtain competitive employment, and take control of their services through self-direction.

Here is a look at a few of the many innovative projects that will be funded through the Transformation Fund:

- People will have more opportunities for jobs in their communities. Funds will support new assessment services and support agencies to transform their operations and build new business models. To accomplish new business model transformation, one organization will offer technical assistance and support to sheltered workshop providers as they convert to competitive employment business models.
- People can choose to self-direct their services. One grant will focus on helping individuals interested in self-direction, and their families, to more fully understand the option of self-directing and the opportunities and benefits of self-direction. Individuals will have the ability to work with a self-direction coordinator to develop a plan and budget and access to technology supports to assist with the implementation of their self-directed plan.
- People will have more opportunities to live in the community of their choice. The

funding will pilot and expand person-centered housing transition services. One agency is developing a comprehensive plan for the conversion of six Intermediate Care Facilities and will also increase opportunities for individuals to transition out of certified residential settings and access community-based integrated supportive housing options. This will include the development of a transitional housing model that can be replicated regionally and statewide, with a focus on fading staff intensity as individuals learn skills and foster greater independence in integrated community-based housing.

- People will be supported by agencies that can operate more efficiently using paperless information systems that integrate person-centered practices and promote the use of Personal Outcome Measures (POMs). One such agency will implement an Agency Management Platform and fully convert to a paperless electronic data system in order to improve quality of services and the ability to communicate individuals' changing needs in a timely manner. Without an integrated platform, the data would have to be separated from each individual record and manually reentered into a database for the purpose of analysis and reporting.

You can read more about these and other projects being awarded BIP Transformation Funds on our [website](#). Over the coming months, our website will highlight some of the transformative outcomes accomplished by this funding and how these projects are directly benefiting the lives of people we serve. ■



## Spring Has Sprung!

After such a snowy and cold winter, New Yorkers are ready to get out and enjoy the great outdoors this spring! Here are some quick and easy links to make your spring special.

### For springtime events in New York:

<http://www.iloveny.com/seasons/spring-summer/#.VMKl64so62w>

### Get some fresh air:

<http://parks.ny.gov/>

### For spring health and safety tips:

<http://www.nsc.org/act/events/Pages/safety-events-spring-forward-with-safety.aspx>

### Spring Farmer's Markets (interactive map)

<http://www.agriculture.ny.gov/ap/communityfarmersmarkets.asp>

### Spring Travel Tips:

#### **N.Y.S. Department of Transportation**

<https://www.dot.ny.gov/travel>

#### **N.Y.S. Thruway Authority**

<http://www.thruway.ny.gov/travelers/>

#### **Metropolitan Transit Authority**

<http://www.mta.info/>

### Learn about the birds of New York:

<http://ny.audubon.org/birds-wildlife>



# Carpentry Class

**By Arnold Bolanos**

*Arnold lives in a state-operated Intermediate Care Facility on Long Island. He is employed by Consumer Employment Services Training (CEST), which includes working in the "token store" at the DDSOO. Arnold enjoys keeping busy and being social with his peers. He also plays on a basketball team. His favorite sport to watch is soccer and last year he traveled to New Jersey to watch a game between the Red Bulls and Chicago. Arnold is currently in his second carpentry course at the Eastern Suffolk BOCES.*



I like to go to carpentry class because I am learning to cut wood with the electric machines and watching videos that show us how to do roof molding, siding, battery machines, charging machines, gun-shot (pneumatic nail gun) machines and nailing with the hammer, too. Also, there are videos showing constructing sheets, houses, making walls with wood, making cement, putting doors together, wood floors and crown molding.

My teacher has been telling us that watching carpentry on the television is the way you learn to work making houses, basement and living rooms, kitchen cabinets, bedrooms and bathrooms, tables, and other furniture. Also, floors using tiles to put in kitchens and bathrooms. When watching, it appears easy, but it is not easy because you have to practice to measure, cut, marking with the level and pencil. You also have to

use measuring tape and also with the level you have to be exact in the middle or it is always wrong.

I have to keep taking some more courses of carpentry. This way, when I leave here I have something to live the rest of my life and future. In carpentry class, people watching the teacher doing things with electrics, different saws and machines. Also I have been making small projects.

I like carpentry because everything you make you can always use. For example, small table for dinner/lunch or doing your homework. I always liked carpentry because it is something I'd like to be, a carpenter in my country.

In carpentry class, I made house tiles and a lot of things. That's why I like it so much. I try to pay attention and listen to everything we do in carpentry class. ■

## “Horsing Around” in Spring

Fresh air and sunshine are good for both your body and mind and Therapeutic Riding programs are a great way to enjoy the warmer weather and have some fun.

### What is Therapeutic Riding?

According to Wikipedia, Therapeutic Riding is “the use of horses and equine-assisted activities in order to achieve goals that enhance physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and educational skills for people who have disabilities.”

The therapeutic benefit is received because the horse walks with a rhythmic movement that mimics the human gait (walk). When riding, the body of the rider moves in a similar fashion as the horse which promotes “strength, balance, coordination, flexibility and confidence.” And it’s FUN!



### Where can I ride?

There are many stables in New York State that are accredited through The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH). This organization conducts a rigorous training for program facilitators and ensures high standards for the stable, horses and program safety measures. Please click the following link for a list of [PATH approved stables](http://www.pathintl.org/path-intl-centers/find-center): <http://www.pathintl.org/path-intl-centers/find-center>

### Who can ride?

Almost Anyone! Therapeutic Riding is especially beneficial for disabilities including Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Cognitive and Developmental Delays and mobility problems. The only individuals who are not suited for this activity are those who may be allergic to horses and/or who may become injured while riding due to physical constraints including pressure sores, fragile bones and uncontrolled Epilepsy.

For those who must remain in a wheelchair, there is Therapeutic Driving in which a carriage is driven by the individual who would otherwise ride.

Spring is a great time to get outdoors and try something new, so let’s go! ■

# Moving Towards Independence

**Submitted by Dinorah E. Santos,**  
*Community Relations Specialist,  
Community Services for the  
Developmentally Disabled*

Xavier and Richard Chestnut know how to live their fullest life possible. After their mother passed away, Xavier and Richard moved into a supported apartment operated by Community Services. They worked with staff that supported them to learn the skills they needed to get ready for work every morning, budget their funds and schedule appointments. The goal was to prepare them to live independently in the community.

resources they need and hire their own staff. The choice-based program is designed to promote independence and to build confidence as an individual takes control of their own life.

Richard and Xavier found their first apartment close to family in the Buffalo area. Their first staff member was a Self-Determination Assistant who provided them with support and assistance based upon their needs. They also hired Lindsey to be their Life Coach. A Life Coach assists with scheduling daily routines, attending doctor's appointments, shopping for groceries, paying bills, and much more.

Being able to hire their own staff was a big confidence booster for the brothers. They were able to ask questions that pertained to their individual needs and wants. Xavier took this as a chance to really step up to the plate as an independent individual. Despite their initial shyness, once the brothers were handed the steering wheel to their own lives, they blossomed! Now both Xavier and Richard are quick to speak up when they have any issues, letting their supportive staff know how they would like the issues resolved.

Prior to living in supported apartments, the brothers needed

constant reminders to set their alarms to get up in time for work. Since living independently, they set their alarms without reminder, iron their clothes, and prepare their lunches for work. Lindsey has worked with them to create a mail sorting system, helping them keep their bills organized. Richard and Xavier are eager to learn how to cook and set food aside for the staff to help teach them how to prepare it.

Richard has begun taking art classes. He was taught how to draw by one of his brothers who has since passed away. "He taught me how to draw faces and I kept going from there," says Richard. He likes to paint in his room with his door closed, "It's nice to have some quiet time. No one is bothering you because you're by yourself." Xavier has been taking guitar lessons. Music is a passion of his and he makes sure he expresses that to the staff that he hires. He goes to sleep to music, wakes up to music, and cleans to music. "When I'm playing, it gets me happy and gives me joy. It feels like I can do anything I put my mind to," says Xavier. ■



As their confidence began to grow, Richard and Xavier began inquiring about the opportunity to move into their own apartment. They looked forward to this option, as it would mean they would be able to self-direct their services. A self-directed plan lets individuals choose what

## We Want to Hear from You!

Send us your story ideas, events, pictures and artwork for the chance to be featured in the People First newsletter.

Mail to: Communications Office, NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, 44 Holland Avenue, Albany, NY 12229 or

email: [Communications.Office@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:Communications.Office@opwdd.ny.gov). You can also follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NYSOPWDD>. ■





# Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

## The Color Purple...

Have you noticed something different about this issue of *People First*? OPWDD has a new look and feel. Our redesigned logo is part of New York State’s rebranding to provide a clear, concise and consistent look across all agencies.

With this rebranding, you will see more consistency and efficiency in graphics, messaging and materials creation, making for a better “customer” experience.

The new branding will define how each agency identifies itself using logos, fonts and color. OPWDD has been assigned a brand color of purple.

There are eight agency groupings with OPWDD being a part of the Health and Human Services category.

We hope you like our new look. ■

## A Look Ahead

### March

- Brain Injury Awareness Month
- National Nutrition Month
- 3/21** World Down Syndrome Day
- 3/26** Purple Day For Epilepsy

### April

- National Autism Awareness Month
- Occupational Therapy Month
- 4/2** World Autism Awareness Day
- 4/22** Earth Day

### May

- Better Hearing and Speech Month
- Mental Health Month
- Mobility Awareness Month
- 5/6** National Nurses Day
- 5/10** Mother’s Day
- 5/27** Senior Health & Fitness Day

### June

- Men’s Health Month
- National Safety Month
- 6/14** Flag Day
- 6/21** Father’s Day

## Transforming Our Future

A panel of experts has been called together by the OPWDD to examine the challenges we face in implementing the Transformation Agenda, offering managed care in our system and ensuring its long-term fiscal sustainability for people currently receiving services and those who will need to access our services in the coming years. OPWDD’s Acting Commissioner will lead this panel and will ask the panel, as one of its priorities, to review how OPWDD proposes to offer managed care prior to our formal request for federal approval to implement managed care in our system. The panel will be asked to shape clear and actionable recommendations to guide our path forward.

As part of the work of the panel, we will engage people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, advocates and providers before deciding on the recommendations and finalizing an implementation plan. Realizing that working together and getting input from all of our stakeholders is more important than ever, we plan to create forums for participation statewide to promote meaningful dialogue, discussion and input.

You can check for regular updates on the Transformation Panel on the [OPWDD website](#). ■

## LIT Mountaineers Take Part in Special Olympics Winter Games in the Adirondacks

Submitted by **Scott Seifert, Sunmount DDSO LIT**

Every winter, the LIT Mountaineers Special Olympics training club throw on skis, snowshoes, and hiking boots to take part in four solid months of training. On March 7, the Mountaineers’ winter training season culminated at the Area 27 Special Olympics Winter Games, hosted for the 18th year by Paul Smith’s College, home of the Bobcats, a respected USCAA Nordic racing team. The Bobcats also happen to be student volunteers. The Opening Ceremonies featured a parade of athletes, an invocation and torch lighting ceremony. Two Mountaineers were selected to lead peers in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and Special Olympics Oath, while another helped carry the Special Olympics banner. Following a day of heated competition and a memorable award ceremony, the Mountaineers congratulated their rivals, thanked their hosts, and returned home to begin planning for the upcoming Softball season.



# Mandy - Her Way

Mandy Shenkman, 39, is a determined young woman who never stops reaching for – and achieving – her goals. Thanks to the strong advocacy of her parents, she attended local schools and had many of the same experiences as her peers, including attending the prom and participating in graduation ceremonies.

**Mandy tells us her story in her own words:**

## MY DAY – MY WAY

**by Mandy Shenkman**

I loved playing “office” when I was a little girl. My gifts came from Staples instead of Toys R Us. I always wanted to be an office worker!

The year was 1994 and the director of special education told me I am going to a sheltered workshop after graduation. I said, “NO!”

The director of my supported work agency asked me, “How many words a minute can you type?” I said, “One”. She told me that I would never work in an office.

In high school I asked for lots of work experiences. I gathered many recommendation letters, developed a great resume, and graduated with an IEP diploma. I was hired for a real part-time office job in 1998. I’m also a Grassroots Presenter for the New York State Self-Advocacy Association. I give talks about my life. I go to work looking very professional.

In 2004 I was approved for Self-Determination. I work, I pay taxes and I vote, just like most Americans.

A few years ago, when my supported work agency refused to develop another part-time office job for me, I looked to my wonderful service coordinator, Linda and my circle of support for help. They developed a paid internship for me. My job coach

is always with me. I transitioned from the internship to a regular employee in a perfect office.

I love my 3 jobs.

My life coaches go to the gym with me; we do over a mile on the treadmill. We read together at the library. We attended the Self-Advocacy course called SANYS U at Queensborough Community College. My cooking coach and I make poached eggs in the microwave. With help from my circle of support, my artwork was displayed at the Queens Museum. ZUMBA at the Y is fun.

Self-Determination gives me the power and the money to live EACH DAY – MY WAY.

## DRESS FOR SUCCESS

**Advice from Mandy Shenkman**

The first rule of dressing for success is “don’t be smelly!” That means daily showering and brushing teeth. Hair should be well trimmed and combed; nails should be neat and clean.

Clothing and shoes should also be clean; make sure there are no wrinkles, no holes and no frayed areas. Pay close attention to the fit; not too tight and not too baggy.

Getting ready for work means, “think first”. Know the season; check the weather. Pick out clothes with the temperature in mind; it’s important to be correctly dressed on the job. Get to work feeling comfortable; if it’s a

warm, sunny spring day, don’t be all bundled up in a heavy coat, but if it’s a cold, snowy day in February, a long sleeve shirt and a sweater under a winter jacket is correct. And don’t forget that shoes or boots must also be right for the weather. Lightweight tops in soft colors are good for hot days, while darker, heavier tops are best for cold days.

Don’t wear loud colors or flashy patterns at work, unless you landed a job as a Big Apple Circus clown.

Start at the bottom; pants in black, navy, brown and grey are wardrobe staples, and then choose a shirt or sweater to go with the pants. Use less jewelry and cologne when at work.

Look at how your co-workers dress. On some jobs, jeans are okay, but make sure. No sweatpants, unless you are leading an exercise class. In the middle of summer, when it’s 95 degrees, don’t come to work in a swimsuit, unless you are a lifeguard at the community pool. Each workplace has written and unwritten dress codes; pay attention to them!

We wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time, so pick out the items in your closet that you love and that you look good in. Get rid of things you never wear. When you shop for clothes, keep your favorite items in mind. Part of the transition from school to successful work is feeling good about how you look.

Look good and do well! ■

# Meet Artist Stacey Mania

Stacey Mania, 33, is a woman of many talents. One look at her artwork shows that she is skilled at reproducing images both from reference material and from life.

Stacey has created several unique painting series depicting her friends, famous artists and musicians, politicians, animals, sunsets, and reproductions of famous paintings. She has captured countless likenesses, including David Letterman, Jay Leno, Alex Trebek, Pat Sajak, Cindy Sherman, Willie Nelson, Andre 3000, Mick Jagger, Bill and Hillary Clinton, George Bush, Barack Obama, Keith Radford, and Chesley McNeil.

“I like to do lots of art,” said Stacey. “I draw pictures such as flowers, animals and even my classmates. I also like to paint some of the pictures.

Stacey’s work has been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums throughout Western New York, including the Buffalo History Museum, Burchfield Penney Art Center Community Gallery, and ArtSpace Buffalo Gallery, where a large number of her portraits were featured in the exhibit, “The Women of Arts Work.”

Stacey is also a skilled photographer and she enjoys participating in a variety of art workshops in the community. Stacey is not only a visual artist, she is a percussionist and vocalist in Autism Services, Inc.’s music group No Words Spoken. Stacey has held lead roles in ASI’s annual musical variety show for many years.

“I also love to sing and I have a beautiful singing voice,” said Stacey. “Some of my favorite



songs are Brown-Eyed Girl, Lean On Me, and Life’s a Happy Song. I also sing the part of the princess for the song “A Whole New World” in our variety show. ■



# World Down Syndrome Day 2015

March 21, 2015 marks the 10th anniversary of National World Down Syndrome Day. According to OPWDD's Institute for Basic Research, Down syndrome is the most common genetic form of developmental disabilities, with a prevalence of 1 in 733 live births in the United States, and 5,000 affected infants born each year. DS is caused most commonly by an extra copy of chromosome 21 (trisomy 21), and this extra chromosome interferes with normal growth and development. Children with Down syndrome are at a significantly higher risk for certain conditions, while adults with Down syndrome are extremely resistant to other diseases. Adults with Down syndrome experience a number of health concerns typically associated with old age, including an increased risk for Alzheimer's disease, and their life expectancy is well below that of most other people. However, the long-term outcome for people with Down syndrome is not as dire as once thought. Some adults with Down syndrome are now living into their late 60s and 70s with few, if any, major signs of Alzheimer's disease—and dementia is far from a certainty, as originally thought as few as 35 years ago. [The Institute for Basic Research](#) is engaged in a number of research projects to better understand the risk of dementia in individuals with Down syndrome, the causes of altered brain development, factors that contribute to cognitive deficits, and more. Visit the IBR section of OPWDD's website to learn more about their research efforts and findings.

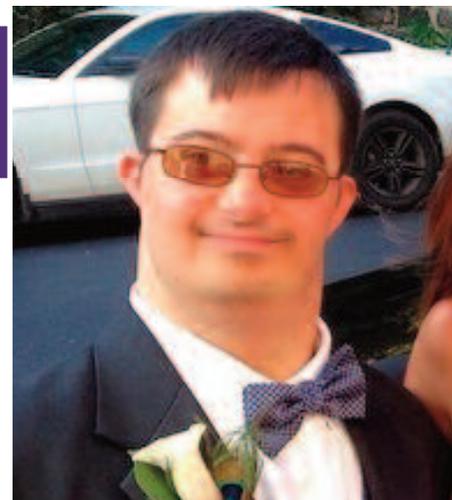
## Meet Christian Gordon

Like a brilliant gemstone, there are many facets to Christian Gordon, a 27-year-old man from Staten Island. Each one illustrates some of his unique interests, skills and hobbies; together they present a shining view of his many accomplishments.

Christian works at Barnes and Noble on Staten Island in the mornings putting books away and organizing the displays. "This is a good job for him because he likes to write. He writes poems and is working on a book," said his mother, Anne Gordon. "I write all sorts of poetry," said Christian. "Romance, among many other topics. My ideas come to me from movies and from real life and from the weather."

Christian is writing his first romance novel. "The plot is about a divorced English teacher and a movie critic who are trying to become a father and mother to his three kids," he said. "The title is called 'Final Chance Jimmy.' It balances non-fiction and fiction, studying the how and why of today's life struggles such as having a fighting chance of winning the heart of the one girl who will love you back." Christian admits that publishing and getting it out to the public is one goal that "needs some working on."

Working at Barnes and Noble is a great help to Christian, who says that writing from home is going to take some time. He likes working there, but adds, "My future plan is to write any form of fiction, do interviews, and do my book and poetry signings at Barnes and Noble."



Christian is most interested in movies. He can tell you the actors, directors, plots, themes, dialogue, etc. of the movies he's seen. He sometimes writes movie reviews. Among his favorite movies are *Goodfellas* with Ray Liotta, *Good Will Hunting* with Matt Damon and Robin Williams, and *Gran Torino* with Clint Eastwood.

AHRC-NYC supports Christian in both his employment and in his afternoon activities, which is an AHRC-NYC day hab without walls program. He learns how to be safe, how to be healthy and how to explore NYC. He travels by bus independently. He is also enrolled in a Saturday recreation program run by On Your Mark in Staten Island where he bowls, lifts weights and participates in a dance class. On Sundays he goes to church and often helps with the collection.

Christian lives at home with his mother, father, and a brother; he also enjoys visiting another brother and sister-in-law who live nearby.

Christian, who has Down syndrome, has many interests and goals he aims to achieve. When asked what he would say to individuals who have developmental disabilities, he said, "My advice is have fun." Good advice from someone who knows who he is and where he is going. ■

# March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month provides an opportunity to increase public awareness of both the needs and extraordinary potential of individuals with developmental disabilities; yet this awareness should not be limited to just one month, it should be spread throughout the year. Awareness was apparent at this year's New York Fashion Week as models with disabilities took to the catwalk for the first time to show that beauty comes in all forms.

This month we recognize the contributions of the individuals with developmental disabilities in New York for their own personal talents and abilities. We also recognize and celebrate the parents, family members, self-advocates, providers, staff members, direct support professionals and volunteers whose commitment and compassion help move the system forward and help to positively change community perceptions of individuals with developmental disabilities. It is awareness, acceptance and understanding that provide individuals with the opportunity to make their own unique contributions to the community at large.



## Proclamation

**Whereas**, more than 127,000 New Yorkers live with an intellectual or developmental disability – a severe physical or mental impairment that slows their learning, limits their mobility and inhibits their expression; and

**Whereas**, people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities benefit from quality individualized supports and services provided through a participatory system built upon the combined efforts of parents, family members, nonprofit providers, public- and private-sector employees whose commitment and compassion have moved the service system forward; and

**Whereas**, individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities have the right to live, work, and participate in the communities of their choice in the most integrated settings possible; and

**Whereas**, New York has established an Employment First Commission, tasked with creating an Employment First policy for New York, which makes competitive, integrated employment the first option when considering supports and services for people with disabilities; and

**Whereas**, New York believes that individuals who have intellectual or developmental disabilities should be protected from abuse and neglect; and

**Whereas**, parents, family members, self advocates, volunteers, staff, government officials, community members, voluntary not-for-profit providers, and others have helped transform New York's system of care into one that provides person-centered, efficient, and effective services that attain measurable outcomes for people who have intellectual or developmental disabilities; and

**Whereas**, as we reflect on how new and expanded opportunities will mean those with intellectual and developmental disabilities can live richer lives, New Yorkers join to recognize the unique contributions they make to our society, applaud their achievements, and support this month-long observance that encourages their continued progress as members of society;

**Now, Therefore**, I, Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby proclaim March 2015 as

## DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH

in the Empire State.



**G i v e n** under my hand and the Privy Seal of the State  
at the Capitol in the City of Albany this second day  
of March in the year two thousand fifteen.

A blue ink signature of Andrew M. Cuomo.

Governor

A blue ink signature of William J. Malton.

Secretary to the Governor