



# Housing Matters



A HUD Housing Counseling Agency

Office of Housing Initiatives & Supports

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## Fall Edition

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition of NY Housing Matters was extremely successful. The housing office received numerous calls of congratulations and recommendations from stakeholders throughout New York State and the nation. We thank you for your feedback and will use your comments to publish an “even better newsletter.”

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, our initial intent was to include a summary report of the one-year anniversary of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) historic October 6, 2009 premiere conference on *building public/private partnerships to advance affordable housing for people with intellectual and other types of disabilities*. But, we could not include the report in the newsletter – *too much to say and share and too little space to do it*. Never within our wildest imagination did we believe that the conference would be such a huge success. Nor did we believe that so many of our existing and new partners would show support, offer their expertise, and provide us with so many valuable and sustainable resources. But they did.

As many of you know, the foundation of the housing office is based on public/private partnerships. Without partners, many of the initiatives developed by the housing office would have minimal chance of surviving, especially in fiscally constrained times. Through the years, we have learned that among the primary ways to keep housing programs operating and expanding is by combining public and private resources, then equally sharing risks and jointly celebrating results.

Please visit OPWDD’s website: <http://www.omr.state.ny.us/housinginitiatives> to read a summary report of the October 6 conference and learn about shared resources and valued outcomes.

This fall edition will include articles from individuals, provider agencies, groups, and organizations that will capture your attention and present some innovative

housing models and projects, stimulate water cooler conversations and lead, hopefully, to more people with disabilities living in a home of their choice. We will also focus some attention on *Person-Centered Environmentally Engineered Homes for People with Disabilities, Smart Home technologies and Land Trusts*. George Braddock, a leader in the country on environmentally engineered homes, affirms that *“a supportive physical environment promotes individual independence and empowerment.”* He gives an example in this newsletter.

Next, we provide an update on some of the special projects within the housing office. In the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, we introduced you to some housing initiatives. This time, we give data to show how many people have taken advantage of these projects and are living, or attempting to live, in their community of choice. We highlight home closings around New York State, present an article on the roll-out of OPWDD’s *Housing Subsidy* program and provide a report on the successful *ICAN* conference held on October 7, 2010 and co-sponsored by New York State OPWDD and The *Center for Family Support*. Among the speakers at the conference were David Lipscomb, President of the NYS Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS), and our own Max E. Chmura, Acting Commissioner, OPWDD.

It is our hope that you enjoy reading these articles and learning about the powerful and systemic transformational projects that are changing the way we think and do business in OPWDD. All of this and more, right here, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *NY Housing Matters*.

*Read, enjoy and share.*

*Thank you.*

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# ***Innovative Non-Certified Housing Programs & Housing Projects***

## **The Change of Control Over People and Their Housing**

### ***The Transformation of Agency Owned to Individually Owned Properties***

Onondaga Community Living (OCL), an agency in Syracuse, N.Y. has been involved with residential services since its inception in 1987. Within the first three years, the agency developed three six-person group homes for people in need, all certified by the state and owned by the agency, where we found people to move into the vacancies we had, a typical service that most agencies developed.

In the early 1990s, OCL began to move away from the traditional agency-owned model. As new people came to the organization for support, it made sense to separate services from housing. The idea was that a person's housing should be in their name as their legal residence—that way their home would always be stable and under their own control. The property would no longer be owned by the agency or certified by the state. Instead people would have homes of their own and would take legal responsibility for them.

With each home, separate budgets for housing needs and support needs were developed. Each person's budget was unique and based on their home of choice and the staff support they required. Additionally, a person could transfer the supportive services from OCL to another entity without losing their home. This separation of services and housing was a major step for the agency in its move toward personalized support for each person that needed residential support.

Today, each home is either rented or in some way owned by the person being supported. Many people chose to rent, whether they transitioned from a group home or came to us as a new person to be supported. Some stayed in the same rental unit for years, while others moved from one rental unit to another until they found what suited him or her best. If a person decided to move, the housing money moved with the person to his or her new address. Others decided that a more permanent home would suit them best. Long-term leases were developed and home ownership also began.

Families also increased involvement in their loved ones' lives. Many homes were chosen based on the neighborhoods that people grew up in and/or buildings that were chosen by a person's circle of support, including family, friends and/or staff. OCL is no longer in the business of finding and certifying

properties; today people choose their own homes based on their personal connections and resources, just as any typical citizen finds a home.

Today, the people that OCL supports are paying mortgages or are tenants. They are signing leases and mortgage papers. All utility bills and household related bills are in the person's name. Each person pays renters or home owners insurance. The people served by OCL are developing credit histories, taking on more personal responsibility in their own lives, and taking on their equal right to be renters, home owners and bill payers of their communities.

### ***The Power of Family***

Families are often involved in helping their loved one to secure a residence. In certain cases, a family member has purchased a home for the person we were supporting, securing it as a long term residence for that person. Other families learned about first time home buyer programs and supported their family member to purchase a home of their own, sometimes including assistance with applying for first-time homebuyer grants to cover down payment and closing costs. Still others learned about trust accounts, and proceeded to find and put homes under a special trust account to allow their family member to reside there for the duration of his or her life.

Many families assist with gathering items for their loved one's home from other family and friends, or by assisting with shopping for what is needed. Some family members also help with the maintenance of the home by mowing lawns, planting flowers or repairing something in need. Families feel more personal ownership in the life of the person. Just as any parent might help their son or daughter move into a first apartment, they are now doing this for their loved one with a disability. They feel all of the worry and excitement that comes with watching a loved one obtain their first place on their own.

### ***The Move towards Socially Valued Roles***

Homeownership and personal tenancy are socially valued roles in this society that many people with disabilities are not afforded. Agencies typically own or lease properties that those with disabilities

*(Continued on page 3)*

## The Change of Control... (continued)

*(Continued from page 2)*

reside within. People live in “homelike” situations owned by the agency that supports them but not in homes that are truly their own. People with disabilities then typically either remain in one home for the duration of their support with no options to move elsewhere. Others might be transferred from residence to residence as their skills improve and they graduate to another level of service, and another agency owned property has a vacancy.

By separating services from housing, a person’s home will remain theirs for as long as they choose to stay there. However, the type of support that one needs within the home could change. Services can transfer from one agency to another and the home will remain stable. Services can adapt based on a person’s changing needs.

Homes of the people served by OCL are now in the country, the city, the suburbs...with land, ponds, pools, gardens, pets...are accessible, condos, rental units, in apartment buildings, single homes, or duplexes. This list is endless. The only commonality is that it is the home of the person’s choosing, in the neighborhood of the person’s choice and in the name of the person who we work for. The control of a person’s home is now where it should be, with the person.

### **Your Home is Your Castle**

Home is where you are free to be the person you are. It is a safe haven; a place to get away, a place that shows your personality; a place that is quiet and welcoming; a place that is alive with the energy you provide; a place where you feel safe and content. It is a home unlike anyone else’s, because it is your personal castle.

- Jill rents a quiet and peacefully decorated apartment. The person she lives with is retired. They have developed a wonderful relationship over the years and have learned to love and trust each other. They enjoy classical music and quiet time together.
- Bob enjoys his family, the water and building things. He owns his own home in close proximity to his family’s home. His family got him a hot tub, his sister built him a pond and his father helped him to build a workshop for his woodworking business.
- Joe loves to fix things. He is always finding things that need repair. He lives in a neighborhood where

everyone knows him. He brings coffee over every morning to the person who works at the church. He rents a home that allows him the space to fix things. He loves pets and has two cats. He visits with his neighbors.

- After several different moves, Lilly and her sister thought it might be better to have a permanent home. They worked with a local housing developing corporation and with a local attorney to find a house that is now in a trust for Lilly. Lilly lives there with her cat and a live-in support person. The house’s other bedroom is for her family when they come to visit from out of town.

*“OCL is trying to accomplish...unique homes based upon the uniqueness of each person within...”*

- Dee uses a wheelchair and needs support with most everything in her life. Her mom really wanted a normal life for her daughter and to have her live close to her. Mom worked with a housing development company to find a house

for her daughter and found a grant that could do the renovations that were needed in the home. The house was put into a trust on Dee’s behalf. The house is near her parents’ home, and Dee lives there with a live-in companion and a variety of support services. Dee, like her mother, loves the sun and being outside. She has a very sunny room with a large sliding glass door that goes out to a deck.

As you can see from the few examples above, each person’s home is of their own design, much the same as my home is different from yours. I live in a corner of the woods. I love the country, my cats, my yard, my bike and my wraparound porch. I like to decorate and have friends over. My home is my castle as yours is your castle. So why shouldn’t it be the same for people with special needs? That is what OCL is trying to accomplish. Unique homes based upon the uniqueness of each person within.

### **Tenancy and Home Ownership Can be for Everyone**

Under the traditional model of support, one would have to acquire a certain skill set to live outside of the group. However, what people need is a desire and a support team to live successfully. The majority of people who have chosen OCL to support them have 24-hour support needs. Many require personal care assistance, some require nursing support, and many need assistance with home maintenance, personal finances and their household routines. Through a

*(Continued on page 4)*

## The Change of Control...(continued)

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combination of unpaid and paid supports, people live quite successfully in homes of their own.

As each person has acquired their own home and developed a good support team around them, we have seen that people are more relaxed, and feel proud of their home and neighborhood. There is comfort in knowing their home is theirs and no one else's. People do not have to compete for attention or space. Each person is known by their name on their street. They are neighbors and community members. They no longer bear the sole label of a client in a system.

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### A Home For Ben and His Friends

Our son Ben was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy at the age of two. We envisioned caring for him for the rest of our lives. Ben is now 25, and he has been living on his own now for three incredible years!

Ben attended Edinboro University of PA and so many doors opened up for us! We realized that if it were possible for Ben to live on campus, out of our care in Edinboro, why couldn't it be possible here? So we began a long journey. If Ben could live on his own, then we would make it possible somehow!

Initially, we developed an Options for People Through Services (OPTS) proposal for Ben and seven others with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and other physical disabilities to live in a house where they could each have their own space, but enjoy the benefits of communal living spaces. At that time Ben had four young men as friends who were in the same boat, looking for residential options but a group home and a nursing home weren't the right fit. We thought our vision to be very out of the box and a wonderful option for our kids.

In March 2007 Ben was in his last semester at Edinboro. We received a call that he was going in an ambulance to the hospital, he had a hip fracture. Ben spent the next three months in hospital and in a hospital bed in the living room recovering from this trauma. It turns out this was a blessing in disguise, as Ben was declining in health specifically his respiratory function which we probably wouldn't have known if not for this episode. It was a blessing in disguise for other reasons too!

That year four of the five young men with Duchenne on our OPTS proposal had now passed away from the disease. This was a terrible blow to all

and we were scared that Ben would be next.

About this same time we had started The Independence Foundation. Mostly to accommodate power wheelchair soccer, however, the Housing idea was in the "back of our minds".

The Independence Foundation was formed in March 2005. In May of 2007 we fast tracked the housing idea and located an existing home in East Aurora. It could easily be modified to meet our needs. We worked up a budget, identified interested individuals and got approval from our Board.

From May, 2007 to July, 2007 we bought, renovated, and moved in the very first Independence House tenants! Of course there were a lot of details, but the end result was that we now had a home where three individuals could live, including Ben!

Our Independence Houses are unique in that they are not certified sites. We do not get funding from the state or DDSO to purchase the home. The rents pay the mortgage and all included living expenses. The individuals living in these houses have total control of how they live, including hiring their own staff. Ben

and his roommates truly live in their own home. The house looks and feels like any other home, with many accessible adaptations. The Foundation is the landlord and these young adults have reached a level of independence that prior to this had never been seen!

I say houses, because we now have two! In January of this year we opened our second Independence House!

We believe we have a model that works. Of course – someone has to be responsible for the houses. I am the "volunteer house manager" at the first house. We have a house manager at the second house who was a staff member at our first house. She

*"Ben and his roommates truly live in their own home."*

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## A Home for Ben...(continued)

(Continued from page 4)

is fabulous! She works as an independent contractor. The Independence Foundation has no paid full time or part time employees – we are an all volunteer organization!

You might ask How could they accomplish this? Two houses in five years? Purchased and opened each house in two months? Basically, we were able to piece together existing programs to make something that works! We can open the houses so fast because we use Foundation funds to do the remodeling, while simultaneously applying for environmental modifications (e-mods). We do apply for e-mods and some Individual Supports and Services (rental subsidy) monies that comes from the local DDSO. But other than that there are no

long term funding sources from the state. We have built a program that we believe is relatively safe from budget cuts and a wonderful option for individuals who need substantial physical supports but can manage their own lives.

It is nothing short of a miracle that Ben is alive and living on his own for three years now! We have found that miracles aren't so few and far between – they are all around us! You just have to have the eyes to see them and sometimes you have to help them to happen!

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## Ulster-Greene ARC: A Pilot Project

**Y**OU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?

*A pilot project in decertification of an existing OPWDD residential home.*

When I was in high school, my senior quote in my yearbook was:

*“Lord, help me to accept the things I cannot change,  
 The courage to change the things I can,  
 And the wisdom to know the difference...”*

That was the type of experience I had when Laurie Kelley, our Executive Director, asked me to explore redesigning our residential program so that we could create fuller lives for the people to whom which we provide services.

And so, this assignment forced me to look at other than certified housing initiatives for the people we serve at Ulster-Greene ARC. Now, before I go any further, the reader should know that as an administrator, the actual writing of this article causes me great angst. I have already had to do several deep-breathing exercises, meditation, and being Catholic, several decades of the rosary. Throughout my career, my marching orders were clear: Create high quality programs which lead to individuals with developmental disabilities achieving full lives, and when a program was in trouble, do whatever is necessary to save an operating certificate. You can imagine the position I was in when Laurie approached me with the idea of creating a greater impact on the lives of the people we serve by developing affordable housing initiatives through a

potential decertification process – “You want me to do what?” were my exact words.

Of course, the idea of each individual within our residential facility having their own apartment or a home of their own is incredibly appealing. And, let's face it—it is the right thing to do. But Ulster-Greene ARC is a fairly large organization with a number of certified programs. Of our \$46 million dollar budget, \$22.5 million is dedicated to our residential budget. The real question is whether an agency such as ours can make significant changes in our residential programming without destabilizing the entire organization.

### ***Incredible Support from OPWDD's Office of Housing***

After completing a significant amount of research on affordable housing, Laurie suggested I speak to Dr. Lucinda Grant-Griffin, the Director of the NYS OPWDD Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports, as well as some of her team members. To be honest, I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but what I got was more than I imagined.

It was clear from our first meeting that Dr. Grant-Griffin and her team are dedicated to increasing the quality of life for the people we provide services to. There was a real synergy between our agency's team and the team we met with at the Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports, and I walked away with the feeling – hey, this may be a doable project.

So, where are we now? We agreed to continue to meet on a potential pilot project where our agency (with the support of the Office of Housing Initiatives and

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## Ulster-Greene ARC Pilot...(continued)

(Continued from page 5)

Supports) would look at the following areas:

- Becoming a certified Housing Counseling Agency.
- Creating partnerships with affordable housing programs.
- Looking into doing some of our own housing development.
- Considering whether our staff can benefit from these services as well.

While I know that this initiative will be a significant amount of work, there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel – provided by Dr. Grant-Griffin's leadership and the work of the staff at OPWDD's Office of Housing Initiative and Supports.

It would be false to say that it will be easy for a

traditional ARC program to quickly and smoothly give-up their certifications for group homes. Nevertheless, I have stopped using my rosary beads to pray for keeping things the same and started using them to help our agency clearly and constructively look at how we can provide services differently for the benefit of the people we mutually serve. Thank you, Dr. Grant-Griffin, for pointing us in the right direction and for your staff's sincere support.

Amen.

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## The Environment Matters: Shifting the Balance Toward Choice, Control and Participation

The advocates, families and professionals in the disability community have traditionally focused on assuring appropriate supports, services and programs for individual. Until recently, little attention has been paid to the critical role of the physical environment in promoting independence and improving quality of life for the individual and increasing the success of their lives on their own terms. Ultimately, it is the people, the residents, family, staff, friends, caseworkers and neighbors who create a real home. The physical environments, however, plays a central role in shifting the balance away from obstacles and restrictions toward choice, control and participation for the individual.

For many people with disabilities continuing to live with their family is not realistic or desirable, but living in a real home that works and makes sense for them needs to be a real possibility. An institutional configuration, with its systems, processes and procedures, regulates the activities and rhythms of life. In a home it is the positive relationship between individuals and their aides within a supportive physical setting that improves the quality of life for everyone. In a real home, the activities of daily life – making meals, doing laundry, planning activities and relaxing – take precedence over institutional protocol. People live a more integrated life and aides are able to assume the appropriate support role.

### **Anna's Story**

Anna spent many hours each day in the bathroom in intense water play, a source of tremendous stress on her family and damaging to the physical structure of the house. Based on an evaluation of the space, Anna's desires and her family's needs, a remodel plan was developed to improve the layout and technical performance of the bathroom. Grab bars, impervious materials, heated surfaces, improved lighting, durable fixtures and other elements were introduced. The evaluation of the completed project and its effect on Anna's life shows that she can now do what she clearly enjoys without negative consequences. Safety is improved, damage to the building is minimized and her family experiences significantly less stress and more freedom because they spend less time doing intensive supervision and clean-up. Anna has exhibited a reduction in behavioral episodes because she experiences more choice, control and independence in her life. Anna's ability to continue to live at home with her family is a substantial return on the investment in physical improvements.

### **The Active Role of the Environment**

The environment should be made so that a person can live the way they want, provided it can be done safely. In Anna's case, this meant making a

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## The Environment Matters...(continued)

bathroom where her love of water play had no negative consequences. Other activities – banging on walls, picking, slamming doors, smearing, wandering, repetitive motion, screaming or just sitting, using a wheelchair or directing your own care – will require different environmental solutions to achieve this end. Visibility and access to all parts of the home, including kitchens, utility rooms, the yard and beyond gives people greater control of their life. In all cases, the environment should encourage and support resident use of the home in a way that satisfies them and reduces negative consequences.

A supportive environment can free a person from impediments, empowering them to live an increasingly satisfying and independent life. This profound and positive shift becomes more possible in small group settings, but small size alone does not guarantee success. Layouts and amenities commonly available in conventional housing may restrict the activity of the person. Houses which require multiple residents to share a bedroom, for example, or where diets are dictated by a dietician and meals are prepared remotely and then rethermalized, are recreating an institution within the community. Indeed,

it is possible to create an institution in a house with only one resident.

### ***More Than a Just a Home – A Place in the Community***

Experience has shown that people with disabilities are more likely to find acceptance in older established neighborhoods with a mix of age groups, lifestyles and economic circumstances. These neighborhoods provide public places for being seen and for meeting, such as parks, corner stores, sidewalks and pedestrian-friendly streets, giving neighbors an opportunity to encounter and interact with one another. This can lead to breaking down the common stereotypes of people with developmental disabilities, opening the possibility for friendship and place in the community.

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## Calculating Housing Subsidies in the Individual Supports and Services (ISS) Program

In October 2010 the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) implemented a new way of calculating housing subsidies under the Individual Supports and Services (ISS) program. ISS funding is available to individuals who seek to gain choice or self-direction in their living environment by moving into uncertified, community-based residential settings. Typically ISS funds have been used to fund rent and utilities, although they sometimes cover other living costs such as food, clothing, transportation, etc.

In 2008, a review of the payment structure under the ISS program prompted an initiative to redesign the way housing subsidies were calculated. The objective was to develop a housing subsidy methodology that focused on the core mission of providing housing supports that exhibit consistency and equity on a statewide basis. An additional goal was to create a uniform housing subsidy budget application to be used statewide.

The new methodology was developed over a period of two years based on an analysis of information from existing ISS budgets and a review of methodologies utilized by other entities providing

similar housing supports. Special attention was given to the methodologies utilized by HUD and the Department of Health's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Waiver (as administered by NYS Homes and Community Renewal).

In December 2009 the proposed methodology was finalized and implemented on a pilot basis in Finger Lakes, Western NY, and the NYC DDSOs (Bernard Fineson, Brooklyn, Metro and Staten Island). The purpose of the pilot was to test the new methodology, develop a standardized budget application, and develop a training protocol for statewide implementation.

The main components of the subsidy calculation methodology can be summarized as follows:

- An individual's housing subsidy will be calculated based on an individual's income and the NYS Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) county maximum payment standards.
- An individual is expected to contribute 30% of their countable income towards housing expenses, inclusive of utilities.

## Housing Subsidies...(continued)

- Countable income is after tax income less disregards for personal needs and other expenses identified on the new ISS budget application.
- Each individual will use the statewide standardized ISS budget application.
- The ISS program provides a housing subsidy, it will not directly subsidize other living and/or program costs.
- The transition stipend (start-up) allowed under ISS will be limited to a \$3,000 base plus one month's rent, to be used for security deposit, broker's fee or first month's rent)

Effective October 1, 2010 this methodology is being used to calculate the housing subsidy for individuals enrolling in the ISS program. Individuals already enrolled in the program will be expected to complete the statewide budget application but for

the time being will be grandfathered in at their existing subsidy level.

The restructuring of the ISS housing subsidy calculation methodology and reimbursement represent a change in the program framework. The DDSOs continue to maintain the program and approve ISS budgets based on district priority and availability of funds. ISS is a low cost residential option that is encouraged by OPWDD as a means of providing housing supports to individuals who seek independence in uncertified settings while maximizing resources. There are currently 2,145 enrolled in the ISS program.

*Submitted by:*

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***For information about ISS, please contact your local Developmental Disabilities Services Office***

## ICan Conference

On October 7, 2010, over 300 people took Acting Commissioner Max Chmura up on his invitation to :

- Listen to individuals discuss their lives of distinction and how their families, providers and OPWDD staff worked collaboratively to make them happen;
- Hear how provider agencies successfully supported these efforts and became able to offer more individualized supports and services;
- Learn what OPWDD has done to make it easier for people and families to get the individualized supports and services they want and for agencies to provide them to more and more people; and
- Hear about national trends and how individualized supports and services are offering a more sustainable future.

The event - titled ***ican -live, work, have friends, be healthy*** - was co-sponsored by the newly named NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the Center for Family Support.

The day featured presentations by nationally

and internationally renowned leaders in the area of individualized supports and services as well as the voices of people from NYS who have proven by their own actions and their own lives what is possible with courage, perseverance, and the support and belief of others. The day was led off by Steve Vernikoff, Executive Director of The Center for Family Support; our own Acting Commissioner Max E. Chmura and -- an inspiring speech by David Libscomb, the President of SANYS. David set the tone for the day talking about his own journey from an institution to now, working and living in his own apartment, with staff he hires.

Among the speakers were - Nancy Thaler, the Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Development Disability Services; John O'Brien and Derrick Dufresne, both known internationally for their leadership in the areas of individualized supports and services. They joined Beth Mount - long one of New York's creative thinkers in this field and a panel of inspiring individuals - who along with their family, community and agency supports - so emphatically proved the day's theme: I CAN!!!

*Submitted by:*

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## Concepts of Independence: My Story

My name is Regina Fowler. I am a person with a developmental disability, born with Cerebral Palsy. For all my life, I lived with my family in our home in the Bronx, N.Y. I grew up with four of my sisters and six of my brothers. My family was always there to support me and still is today. Growing up was a challenge for me being that I was the only one with a disability. As I got older, I knew that I wanted to live on my own because I saw that my brothers and sisters were moving on with their lives and many other changes. I wanted the same things in life.

Eight years ago, I moved into my own apartment in the Bronx; it is a subsidized apartment under HUD. I have been living on my own all of that time, there were challenges I was faced with through the whole process, learning how to write a check to pay my bills, and keeping up with house work which my home attendant assisted me with, she was from an agency in the Bronx, which was non-self-directed.

I work every day and have requirements to meet. To get to work I use Access-A-Ride transportation, and have to be on time for the transportation or else they will leave me. I work as an OPWDD HUD Housing Counselor at 75 Morton Street in Manhattan, and also I work as a Grass Roots Presenter for Self-Advocacy in the same location.

Being that I'm a person with Cerebral Palsy, there are days when it's very hard for me to walk, because my muscles get very tight, it causes me to have muscle spasms. It can get overwhelming sometimes, especially in the winter months, this can make it hard for me to get ready in the mornings for work, and go about my daily activities. Without my home attendant's help, it would make it impossible for me to meet my requirements for work.

The agency that I was working with in the past would send me people who I had no idea who was coming, that's if I knew they were coming at all. I had no control of who I wanted in my apartment. It was hard to control and sometimes made it difficult for me to meet the requirements of my jobs.

*“Growing up was a challenge for me being that I was the only one with a disability. As I got older, I knew that I wanted to live on my own because I saw that my brothers and sisters were moving on with their lives and many other changes. I wanted the same things in life.”*

Then I learned about Concepts of Independence, which is an organization that is a Self-Directed home attendant agency. I have now hired an attendant from Concepts. The purpose of me having a self-directed Agency is that it allows me to have the freedom to hire individuals who I might feel comfortable with. I also have the freedom of firing individuals from Concepts of Independence who do not comply with what I want done. Seven years ago, I had an experience with an individual who worked with me from Concepts who violated my privacy to the point of me having to fire her. The downside of hiring your own person is that you never know who they are until they start to work with you. However, you have the final say about whether they stay working for you.

You don't have to put up with someone who isn't treating you right.

I love the fact that I can schedule my hours with my attendant the way I want to. It is a relief that I feel I can make it to work on time, and still have everything taken care of. My personal-care attendant works in my home from Monday to Sunday, it works out better this way for me because I can get as much done as I need to, from cleaning my apartment to going shopping for food.

I also get residential services through OPWDD, from Friday evenings to Tuesday evenings, from AHRC. Her job is to help me to meet my goals in my home to enhance my ability to keep track of my finances each month. She also works with me on community goals, shopping and to enhance my ability to travel independently on my own.

I would love to be an example to others of how to find a sense of independence using a service that allows you to be in control of your life. Trying new things can be scary, but never let it take control of you. There's a saying, (life is like a box of chocolate, you never know what you gonna get) but you never know until you try.

*Submitted by:*

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**Downstate Housing Office**

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## Smart Technologies and Persons with Disabilities

Microsoft founder Bill Gates was the first to introduce the concept of a "Smart Home" into our vernacular in the 1990s when he built a home that included technology to run the lights, monitor conditions inside and outside the home, and allow for other technological conveniences. However, the technology has been in existence since the early 1970s and has been used for helping senior citizens and persons with disabilities live more independent lives.

There has been a trend in the disability community over the last decade to move people out of institutional care and into community settings where they can live in their own apartment or home and pursue a much more inclusive lifestyle. New York State has invested in the expansion of home and community-based care services that are designed to allow people with disabilities and/or the aging to stay in their own homes and communities, often closer to family, friends and other advocates for their continued care. One of the issues with implementing community-based care is the caregiver demands on the family and/or the availability of home health care workers. Smart Home technology is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century way to reduce these concerns in an efficient and effective manner.

A "Smart Home" is a residence that is equipped with technology that responds to and even anticipates the needs of the occupants. Reminders to take medicine, technology to track movements and accidents, and monitor vital signs are all possible today through the use of smart technologies. In addition, those with cognitive disabilities will greatly benefit from reminders and alarms that can be programmed to tell them what to do, where to go, or how to go about doing something in the home. The available technology packages range from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. Within the disability community, this smart technology is more commonly referred to as electronic assistance technology (EAT) or electronic aids to assist daily living (EADL). In addition there is assistive

technology for cognition (ATC) which helps support individuals with more cognitive disabilities.

Smart home technologies will allow persons with disabilities as well as our aging population the opportunity to live independently without the need to be institutionalized. Family members and advocates can also know the individuals are safer and more secure in their environments than they would be without these assistive measures in place. Sensors and monitors can raise an alert if a home occupant falls in the night, has an accident, or shows any odd variance in their vital signs. Such technology, though initially expensive to implement, arguably outweighs the enormous cost of institutional care which can reach many tens of thousands of dollars annually.

The impact to our health care system from using smart technology over institutional care has the potential to be enormous. As an example, in Norway, the yearly cost of placing a person in an institutional care facility runs between \$75,000-125,000 (U.S. dollars) per person. A study carried out by Resource for Readjustment indicates that the cost of establishing and implementing a Smart Home would amount to about \$38,000. With our already extremely large and expensive health care system, such a savings per individual would be a huge benefit to Medicare and Medicaid as well as the personal savings of many families who may have to use up their personal savings before any federal benefit programs would kick in to cover these institutional costs.

The number of companies that work with Smart Technology is growing rapidly and ranges from companies that offer small solutions for consumers to companies that build full-functioning Smart Homes for persons with any type of condition or disability that requires assistive technology.

*Submitted by:*  
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<sup>1</sup> M. Lev-Ram, Smart home gets and upgrade, *Money* (2006), retrieved from [http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2\\_archive/2010](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2010)

<sup>2</sup> Fozard J., Rietsema, J., & Graafmans, J. (2000). Gerontechnology: Creating enabling environments for the challenges and opportunities of aging. *Education Gerontology*, 26, 331-334.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www2.telemed.no/eHealth2005/PowerPoint\\_Presentations/Tuesday/Fokus4/1130-1300\\_F4\\_tue\\_TorilLaberg\\_Smarthouse.pdf](http://www2.telemed.no/eHealth2005/PowerPoint_Presentations/Tuesday/Fokus4/1130-1300_F4_tue_TorilLaberg_Smarthouse.pdf)

## The Use of Land Trusts for Special Needs Housing

As we continue to look for different ways to provide housing opportunities for individuals with disabilities in New York State, a trend that is not new has become a viable option: Land trusts. There are two types of land trusts: 1) Conservation trusts, which acquire and protect open space and agricultural land, and 2) Community land trusts, which tend to focus more on housing and community development.

Housing and Community Development (HUD)

Land Trusts have the flexibility to be constructed in ways that allow communities and municipalities to address several housing issues. To do this, they leverage federal, state and local dollars in partnership with community based organizations (which are traditionally the land trusts). Community land trusts typically acquire and hold land, but sell the house (residence) on the land. In this way, the cost of land in the housing equation is minimized or eliminated, thus

## Land Trusts...(continued)

*(Continued from page 10)*

making the housing more affordable. The land beneath the home is leased to the homeowners through a long-term, renewable lease. Residents and their descendants can use the land for as long as they wish to live there. The land lease requires that the homeowners live in their home as their primary residence. When a home is resold, the lease ensures that the new homeowners will also be residents.

Land trusts also have the ability to restrict the resale price of the home in order to maintain the “affordable housing” in the neighborhood. Once the land trust takes possession of the land, the use of the residence or house could be designated for special needs/affordable housing, thus creating permanent housing. This model is beneficial for several reasons: It provides the opportunity for creative funding for municipalities to meet their housing goals, allows for quality-of-life initiatives, and enables sustainable community projects. This type of collaboration between community land trusts, community based organizations, and local, state or federal entities can be funded by several different packages, including

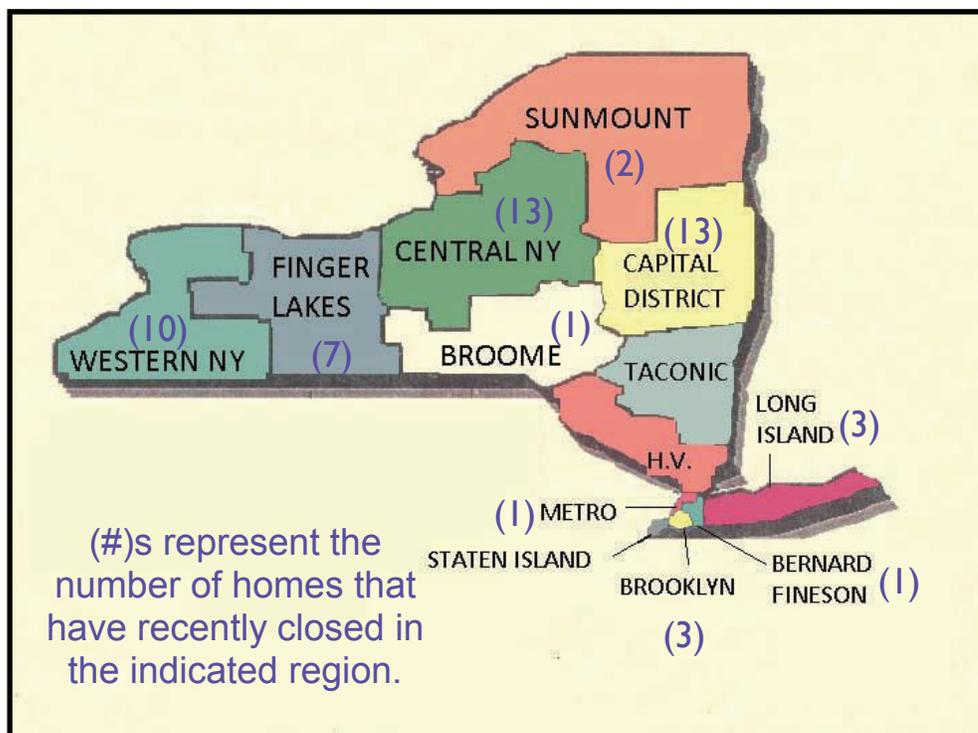
commercial mortgages, construction loans, HUD loans and grants, state housing finance agency dollars, private foundation loans and grants, and tax credit dollars.

The above is just one example of how land trusts can be used to provide special needs/affordable housing. Currently in Rochester, N.Y., there is a housing and community development land trust. We have introduced the idea of including specific special needs housing as part of their land portfolio’s use. We would like to share unique and creative ways communities across New York have addressed housing issues for people with disabilities. If you know of land trusts in your community that have focused on housing, or if you are interested in sharing your thoughts on and experiences with land trusts as a way of providing special needs housing, please contact Valerie Johnson.

*Submitted by:*  
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## Housing Initiatives

**Some recent Home of Your Own closings around the state:**



## The HOME Grant

The Office For People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) operates a HOME Grant program that is available to adults with developmental disabilities and to parents or legal guardians who have a family member with a developmental disability and are seeking to purchase their first home. Both populations must be 1<sup>st</sup> time homebuyers\* and income-qualified.

HOME Grant funds are provided through a competitive process by the New York State Housing Trust Fund Corporation. HOME Grants are "forgiven loans." That is to say, if you live in the house five or 10 years (depending on the amount of the loan), you do not have to repay the HOME Grant. If you sell the house before five or 10 years, you will have to repay the HOME Grant on a prorated basis.

Funds may be used for down-payment assistance, as a mortgage subsidy, for closing-costs assistance; and for moderate rehabilitation.

The amount of HOME Grant funds awarded is based on the individual and household's position in regards to the Area Median Income (AMI.). The majority of awards given by OPWDD are to individuals and families who have incomes at or below 50% of the AMI. To date, 38% of awards were made in the Albany county; 19% in Schenectady; 14% in Orange; 9% in Montgomery; 5% in Clinton; 5% in Dutchess; 5%

in Madison; and 5% in Saratoga.

Prior to any awards being made, two inspections must be made by a licensed New York State Inspector on the home chosen by the individual or family. The two inspections are a full professional home inspection and a Housing Quality Standards Inspection (HQS). Homes that do not "pass" both inspections are not awarded HOME grant funds.

The HOME Grant Program has shown itself to be a powerful tool in helping first time homebuyers achieve their goals. Since the inception of the program in July 1996, nearly 40 households in New York State have received HOME Grants totaling \$638,000. Research has shown that many of these households would not have been able to purchase their homes without the assistance of the HOME Grant Program.

If you are interested in learning more about OPWDD's HOME Grant program, please contact the Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports at (518) 473-1973, or [housing.intiatives@omr.state.ny.us](mailto:housing.intiatives@omr.state.ny.us).

*For more information, please contact:*

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## AFI: An Update

Since the housing conference, there have been numerous requests from various DDSOs to be included in the Assets for Independence/ Individual Development Accounts (AFI/IDA) 4:1 matched savings program. The housing office is working with the federal funding agency to expand the number of counties served (details to follow). In the upcoming months, the director and staff from the housing office will embark on the annual "Fall New York State Thruway Road Trip" to conduct orientation sessions and give existing applicants an opportunity to review and sign, then open, their own AFI/IDA accounts with M&T Bank. These orientation sessions have proven to be the most effective way of spreading information about the AFI/IDA program. Since August of 2009 a total of 30 orientation sessions have been held in the eligible regions. Altogether the sessions have introduced the AFI program to over 300 interested individuals. A significant portion of the session attendees were Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs), members of the New York State's workforce that can spread the word about AFI to all of the individuals that they support.

These interest-earning accounts will be

monitored by Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports to ensure that the participant is making the minimum monthly deposits to reach the saving's goal in their chosen time frame. The time it will take a participant to complete their savings will vary from person to person. Some individuals will be able to reach their saving's goal in under a year, while others will need over two years. AFI/IDA participants must save for at least six months; no-lump-sum deposits will be accepted. One of the major goals of the program, as stipulated by the federal government, is to assist participants with making a habit of saving and developing a budget with their earnings.

As indicated in the first edition of *NY Housing Matters*, eligible populations for the AFI/IDA program include individuals with developmental disabilities, direct support professionals (e.g. LPNs, developmental aides, secure care treatment aides and developmental assistants) and households who have members with a developmental disability.

*For more information, please contact:*

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## Faith Communities as Trusted Resource Networks

During times of economic crisis, people have turned to their local faith communities for additional resources. Historically, faith-based communities (faith-based organizations as well as houses of worship) have provided social services such as food, clothing, and housing supports. Faith communities have an additional role in their community: through their newsletters, programs and bulletin boards they have become an informational center for agencies and community organizations.

For example, in my church, we carry a listing of all employment opportunities and exams for state and county agencies. We also receive and post brochures and information for upcoming forums on human services and community activities. Prior to attending worship, congregants can look at the community board (as well as the worship program) and find information that is important to them. This information has been received from local, state, and federal agencies who want their programs to receive community awareness, and varies on topics ranging from services for energy (heating), low-income families, domestic violence, senior citizens, youth, as well as housing and human services.

Community organizations also send their upcoming activities to houses of worship for promotion. Most often, in order for such information to be posted, it must receive approval from the faith leader(s) who feels that it is appropriate material for their membership. This is where agencies and organizations have an opportunity to build a valuable relationship with faith communities.

Government agencies and community organizations realize that a good way to reach a large portion of the community is to send information on their programs to houses of worship for promotion. This is particularly true in cultural, ethnic and minority communities. It has been long noted how a community responds to their faith community leaders. The community has trust in their leaders to provide

them with reliable information as well as finding the necessary resources to obtain services they need.

The next progressive step is to build upon the ability of the faith community to not only provide their members with needed information, but their ability to provide an active educational forum for agencies and groups to interact with the community at large.

Agencies and organizations need to do more than pass out brochures and flyers to those communities of people to whom they would like to reach with their programs. The best tool organizations can have to know about communities are the faith leaders. By working with faith leaders to help them understand how a program works and could benefit their congregants, the agency's programs will be more largely received. It is important for agencies to understand that due to culture and other concerns, not everyone will come to their offices Monday through Friday from 9a.m. to 5p.m. for help. However, if forums are held with the approval of their faith leaders in

a neutral place, such as a connected community center, more programs will be used by the people who need them.

Building relationships with faith leaders to develop trusted resource networks in faith communities is certainly an area of growth not only for the "Home of Your Own" program, but for other programs and agencies as well.

*“Government agencies and community organizations realize that a good way to reach a large portion of the community is to send information on their programs to houses of worship for promotion.”*

*Submitted by:*

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***Note: Reverend Catherine Patterson has served in a faith community more than 20 years.***

## Partnership with Peter Young, Housing, Industries and Treatment

The Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports maintains a strong relationship with the agency's Faith Based Initiatives program as a means of building stronger relationships and reaching more people through community outreach programs. Many individuals applying for housing programs view their worship centers as the focal points of their communities. Currently, OPWDD is building a partnership with Father Peter Young, one of New York State's most important figures in religious communities, to increase outreach and awareness to people in need. This partnership is coordinated with OPWDD's faith initiative.

Since the 1960s, Father Young has fought for the rights of people who usually do not receive much support, including veterans, ex-convicts and addicts, and persons with disabilities. He was able to gain a better understanding of the individuals he assisted by volunteering his time as a chaplain at numerous correctional facilities across the state. Father Young founded the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment program within the New York State Department of Corrections, a program which has since been acknowledged and modeled by numerous other states. When he left the treatment program in 1992 to move on to other endeavors more than 40,000 inmates had enrolled.

One of Father Young's primary goals was to establish residences and provide job training for the people he assists. He believes that providing shelter and employment for these individuals increases their motivation to be productive members of society. More than 80 housing and treatment centers have been set up around New York State to provide

services that cater specifically to the individuals' needs, whether they are in need of emergency housing, transitional housing, or need special care for the HIV virus. All of Father Young's extensive housing options follow the same "Three-Legged Stool" approach; Treatment, Housing and Employment. All three legs of the stool complement each other on the individual's path to recovery.

On August 26, 2010, the Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports traveled to the Schuyler Inn in Menands to present information about their programs to an audience of more than 25 of Father Young's participants and employees. The response to the presentation was excellent. Within minutes of the presentation ending, numerous attendees were scheduling appointments to sit down with OPWDD's housing counselors and begin the Home of Your Own process. Most have a family member with a developmental disability living at home. All were instructed to enroll in 1<sup>st</sup> time home buyer training to understand the homebuyer process.

The housing office and Father Young are excited about furthering their partnership in order to provide affordable housing options to the less fortunate.

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## Words From Around New York State

### Western NY: "Lights, Camera, Action" Approach to Promoting Asset Building and Independence for People With Disabilities

Recognizing the important role asset building plays in housing opportunity and personal independence for people with disabilities, non-profit organizations, government agencies and financial institutions serving Western New York have come together to focus their collective energies on finding new and innovative ways to promote and expand it.

In 2009, the State's New York Makes Work Pay

(NYMWP) initiative awarded the city of Buffalo Medicaid Infrastructure grant funds through the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County's CASH Buffalo coalition. Designed to integrate the local disability community with currently-available asset building programs, the funding brought with it a three-part challenge: To present an informational summit

*(Continued on page 15)*

## Western NY...(continued)

*(Continued from page 14)*

focusing on asset building, to expand tax assistance outreach to Western New Yorkers with disabilities, and to increase local asset building advocacy by at least 10 percent.

Even as they celebrated the success of that summit this past November, the NYMWP Committee – which was formed by a group of the event’s more than 60 participating agencies – was preparing to launch a stepped-up effort to help more area residents with disabilities access the assets potentially available to them through filing federal income tax returns.

“Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, many people with disabilities don’t file,” says Melody Anne Marchese of Belmont Housing Resources for Western New York (WNY), who along with the WNY Independent Living Center, co-chairs the committee; other committee members include the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, First Niagara Bank, Goodwill Industries of WNY, Headway of WNY, Neighborhood

Legal Services, the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, the New York State Self-Advocacy Association, People, Inc., the Restoration Society, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the Western New York Developmental Disabilities Service Office (DDSO).

“They may think that because of their income they don’t need to file,” Marchese notes, “not realizing that even if they aren’t required to, they may still qualify for refunds through provisions like the Earned Income Tax Credit. The amounts of such monies that go unclaimed,” she adds, “are significant, particularly so because of the empowerment that comes with financial self-sufficiency.”

The Committee’s efforts to directly address this concern, Marchese continues, also contributed



*Bringing Effectiveness into Focus: Director Sam Mattle of WNYDDSO [left] and SANYS volunteer/cameraperson Josh Derrick capture how-to demonstration by SA AmeriCorps’s Debbie Lawniczak and SANYS volunteer Eric Bisantz for WNY NYMWP Committee’s tax assistance volunteer training DVD.*

significantly to its success meeting the goal of a 10 percent increase in its asset building advocacy. To maximize its availability and use as an asset-building tool, the partnering organizations made tax awareness a priority component of its outreach to area residents with disabilities and their families.

They mounted a program that included tax workshops conducted at meetings of area disability-related organizations as well as a “Super Refund Saturday” free tax preparation event that drew a record community turnout. “We may have started with the goal of a 10 percent increase,” Marchese reports,

“but by the time we were done, the number of people with disabilities that we helped to prepare and file their 2009 tax returns was 112 percent higher than the previous year.”

Energized by these positive results and looking for ways to make an even greater impact, the Committee was presented with just such an opportunity by additional NYMWP monies received by the United Way. With these funds, the partners are currently developing a

volunteer income tax assistance program instructional DVD which, Marchese emphasizes, “will be written by, produced by and star people with disabilities” along with experts from the participating organizations.

The new module is designed to supplement the training that tax program volunteers already receive. “The more aware and sensitive we are about the needs and options of people with disabilities,” she explains, “the more effectively we can help them build the assets they need to achieve independence and fulfill their dreams.”

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## Finger Lakes DDSO Initiatives

Throughout the summer months, Finger Lakes Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO) has continued to provide informational sessions on the Home Of Your Own (HOYO) program, as well as the Assets For Independence/Individual Development Account program. A HOYO Orientation session was offered in Elmira in early July. As a result of this training, the DDSO has been invited back to the Southern Tier to provide the training to agency staff in early November.

A second orientation session was held in Rochester in July, also in response to an agency request. The training opportunities were rounded out with a September session offered in Rochester. More than 30 people participated in the summer

sessions.

Finger Lakes DDSO continues to support individuals wanting to live independently in non-certified settings. Since the beginning of 2010, 43 new individuals have been supported with Individual Supports and Services (ISS) funds. The receipt of ISS funding has enabled people to move to their own apartments in their communities with either one-time or on-going assistance.

The DDSO looks forward to continuing its role in helping people acquire the home of their choosing.

*Submitted by:*

**Colleen Delaney**

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## Central NY: Access to Independence Launches Housing Campaign

This past April, Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) launched a 15-month Housing Education Campaign made possible through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds and the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL). ATI is one of 19 State independent living centers to receive these funds.

The purpose of ATI's Housing Education Campaign is to educate stakeholders about: the current housing crisis in Cortland County; to expand and preserve affordable, accessible, and integrative housing; and to facilitate discussion about the issues and possible solutions. Housing stakeholders in Cortland County include: residents with disabilities; seniors and individuals at or below poverty level; housing developers and landlords; government agencies and legislative bodies; and other local service providers.

In March, representatives from ATI, Catholic Charities, Cortland Housing Assistance Council (CHAC), and the Office of the Aging, attended the two-day "Housing Policy Academy" training in Albany to discuss the housing needs in New York State and to prepare for the Housing Education Campaign. Attendees received information and tools about housing needs and low income standards for people with disabilities, housing for the aging, understanding the State Consolidated Planning process, fair housing rights, community partnerships with public housing, and

how the Housing Education Campaign will benefit communities.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, ATI staff attended the "Housing 101" training in Albany to gather the resources necessary to develop a strong testimony for use in outreach to Cortland County stakeholders. The day-long training included more detailed information about housing needs, housing programs, solutions to issues, and resources for building an effective education program.

Over the next 12 months, ATI aims to further the Housing Education Campaign on several fronts. One, ATI will provide written or oral testimony at hearings of state, county, city, or town legislative bodies, government agencies, and planning and zoning review boards to preserve or expand affordable, accessible, and integrative housing. Two, ATI aims to expand the knowledge of at least 50 people with disabilities relating to expansion of affordable and accessible housing, and fair housing rights and responsibilities. Three, ATI will sponsor and participate in several events and community activities such as the Pumpkin Fest, Business Showcase, and Builder's Home Show to further promote the purpose of the Housing Education Campaign.

*Submitted by:*

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## A Seminar on Independent Living in Brooklyn, NY

On the afternoon of Thursday September 23, 2010 a seminar on Independent Living for Persons with Special Needs was held at P753 at 510 Clairmont Av in Clinton Hills Brooklyn. Approximately 55 people gathered to hear presentations by Timothy Elliott and Regina Fowler of the New York State Office For People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports, Ray Knight, Executive Director of Elmy's Special Services, and Lucina Clarke, the founder of My Time, Inc.

The host of the seminar, Lucia Lewis, a consultant for the Office of Housing Initiatives and Supports, started the evening by welcoming everyone who took time out after their long day to attend the seminar and remarking on the purpose of the seminar.

Timothy Elliot and Regina Fowler, housing counselors from the OPWDD Downstate Housing Office, who are themselves persons with special needs and living independently, informed the attendees of the many programs that are available to them to secure financing for home ownership.

Ray Knight, Executive Director of Elmy's

Special Services, spoke on programs available through Medicaid to assist in setting up a home for independent living. He also explained the role the Medicaid Service Coordinators play to educate the people about housing opportunities and independent living.

Lucina Clarke, founder of My Time, Inc., spoke on where and how parents with housing challenges can access support and obtain assistance.

The audience, which was comprised of educators from District 75, parents and consumers, were responsive to the wealth of information that was imparted at the seminar. The response to the

speakers shows that there is a need for greater access to this kind of information so that persons with special needs are aware of the possibilities available to them in regard to living independently.



*Clockwise from left: Lucia Lewis of Trinity Hope, Inc., Ray Knight of Elmy's Special Services, Lucina Clarke of My Time, Inc., and Timothy Elliott of the OPWDD Downstate Housing Office.*

*Submitted by:*

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## News to Know About!

### Partnering to Improve and Preserve our Homes and Communities

The State's major housing agencies have officially integrated into a single organization — New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). Brian E. Lawlor, Commissioner/CEO of HCR, announced the integration before nearly 100 affordable housing and community development stakeholders.

Commissioner Lawlor said that one of HCR's top priorities is working with its partners to provide

affordable housing opportunities for special needs populations. He encouraged the development community to tackle hard, complex projects, including supportive housing and other special needs developments. He said he considers this to be the highest and best use of the agency's resources.

The announcement came five months after

*(Continued on page 18)*

## Partnering to Improve and Preserve...(continued)

Governor David A. Paterson appointed Lawlor as commissioner of the State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and CEO and President of “nyhomes,” which included the State’s Housing Finance Agency (HFA), Affordable Housing Corporation and the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA). With the State facing enormous fiscal challenges, Governor Paterson sought to consolidate and integrate the State’s housing agencies under a single leadership and management structure.

While the immediate goal of the integration was to achieve financial savings through enhanced efficiencies, HCR will implement new strategies to confront the increasing economic challenges facing New York State – from the scarcity of affordable housing and increasing homelessness in New York City to abandoned Main Streets and vacant buildings in Upstate New York.

In his remarks, Commissioner/CEO Lawlor emphasized that HCR will be focused on achieving its mission: *partnering to improve and preserve homes and communities*. He also shared HCR’s newly adopted vision:

“To be a national leader, with its partners, expanding opportunities for real choices for safe, decent and affordable housing in safe and vibrant communities that offer a healthy variety of economic, transportation and recreational opportunities.”

HCR will achieve this mission and vision using three strategies: (1) mobilizing resources by aligning its assets, engaging its partners and empowering staff to maximize their total capacity; (2) investing wisely by evaluating investments using a hierarchy of criteria: fundamentals, leverage and outcomes; and (3) increasing accountability by adopting performance measures that will help the agency to constantly adapt and improve.

HCR has taken the first step by analyzing the wide assortment of programs currently administered by staff and then logically reorganizing and integrating those programs into three units: (1) Finance and Development – includes all programs that fund the development of affordable housing; (2) Housing Preservation – includes all programs that help to maintain HCR’s portfolio of existing affordable housing; and (3) Community Renewal – includes all programs geared toward community and economic development, job creation and downtown revitalization. A fourth unit, the Office of the President, includes all the offices that provide operational and professional support services to program staff.

This realignment will allow HCR to leverage

capital resources from its own programs as well as working with other state agencies, public entities and private sector partners to coordinate housing and community revitalization resources to magnify their impact. It will also enable HCR to streamline processes and increase capacity to produce results. This sets the stage for one stop shopping for developers using one application and applying one set of standards and procedures.

### Partnering with OPWDD

Since 2007, the agencies that comprise HCR have financed more housing units for people who need them most, including more than 2,000 units of supportive housing. OPWDD individuals have directly benefitted from this focus. For example, in 2007, parents of people with developmental disabilities became eligible to apply for mortgages under OPWDD’s Home of Your Own Program (HOYO), which is financed by SONYMA. Enabling parents to apply for State Of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA) mortgages eased the financial burdens on families and improved their ability to provide for their children. Since 1997, more than 242 OPWDD connected families have purchased homes under HOYO, borrowing more than \$20 million.

Another exciting partnership between HCR and OPWDD is occurring on the former site of OPWDD’s Bernard Fineson Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Howard Park, Queens. OPWDD determined in 2007 to close the site, and all the residents have now been moved to more modern and independent settings. After a Request for Proposals administered by HCR with assistance from OPWDD, the site will be conveyed to the non-profit Progress of Peoples: Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens. Construction is expected to begin early in 2011 and will result in 80 units of affordable housing for low-income seniors and 20 units of housing for individuals supported by OPWDD. In addition, the complex will feature significant service space for both the low-income seniors and the OPWDD customers.

HCR will continue to seek out opportunities to build and enhance partnerships with agencies and organizations serving our State’s most vulnerable populations.

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## Self-Advocacy Association of NYS: We Have Choices

The Self-Advocacy Association of New York State, Inc. (SANYS) in partnership with the Office For People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and many other organizations, including the State Developmental Disabilities Council (DDPC), have spent the last few years working on a film project called “We Have Choices.” The ideas expressed in this film come from a concept we call “Wheel Power.” An explanation of wheel power is included in the film’s DVD extras. The Board of (SANYS) is very proud of “We have Choices.” We created the film because we wanted to show people with developmental disabilities living their lives as full and contributing citizens of their communities.

“We Have Choices” is a documentary exploring the full lives of people with developmental disabilities who are supported to live in a place they have chosen to call home, in the community of their choice, with supports created by themselves, their family, and their friends. This is a film about history, self-advocacy, family, community, relationships,

love, respect, challenges and opportunities. The film focuses on people who are living in their own apartments and homes, for the most part without 24-hour support; it is important to know that people can live with choice and individualized services regardless of how much support they need, as many do now in New York.

We want to thank the filmmaker, our good friend Jerry Smith from the University of Minnesota, who helped us tell the story of choices in this great video. If you would like us to send you a copy of the film, please call (518) 382-1454 or email [keplite@sanys.org](mailto:keplite@sanys.org). You can also view the film on line at [www.sanys.org](http://www.sanys.org).

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## Closing Remarks

### **Challenge. Change. Inspire.**

These are the three major reasons why the housing office created *NY Housing Matters*. Did any of the articles Challenge you to think differently about non-certified housing? About environmentally engineered housing? About the use of Land Trusts? About homeownership for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities? Will you consider a Change in the way you present housing options and opportunities to the people you support? To your family members? Did we Inspire you to break through your perceived limitations and think about the great possibilities that exist in living in and developing non-certified housing? If you feel even a little challenged, changed or inspired, then we have done our part - at least for this 2nd Edition of NY Housing Matters.

Stay tuned! In the 3rd Edition there is much more to come.

Thank you.

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