



Mark Your Calendar! Works For Me on October 26

OPWDD is holding its fourth annual Works For Me event on October 26 from 10 am to noon in the Hart Lounge at The Egg at the Empire State Plaza in Albany. This event coincides with National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and honors businesses that employ people with developmental disabilities and the employees who are succeeding in these positions.

The unemployment rate for individuals with developmental disabilities is 85 percent. OPWDD is committed to helping people with developmental disabilities gain employment, and our goal is to double the number of people with developmental disabilities who are employed. Businesses that hire individuals with developmental disabilities are tapping into a pool of dedicated and hardworking employees who will improve their bottom line. Individuals with developmental disabilities who are employed are contributing to their community, improving their own quality of life, and becoming self sufficient by earning a paycheck.

This year, OPWDD will honor five businesses in the following categories: small business, medium-sized business, large business, corporate partner, and government/nonprofit business. Albany FOX23 news anchor John Gray will serve as master of ceremonies.

Reserve your seat online! Go to: www.opwdd.ny.gov/cee/wfm_save_the_date.jsp.

Shine the Light on Domestic Violence

Throughout October, OPWDD is participating in the statewide "Shine the Light on Domestic Violence" initiative coordinated by the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV).

OPWDD launched its *I Spoke Out* campaign earlier this year to ensure that people who witness abuse report it. October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month is another opportunity for everyone to recommit themselves to preventing abuse.

OPWDD will be featuring information on its website about domestic violence awareness and is encouraging people to wear purple, the symbolic color for domestic violence awareness, on October 19.

For more information about domestic violence awareness and OPWDD's *I Spoke Out* campaign, visit www.opwdd.ny.gov throughout October.

"Like" us on Facebook

The New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities is on Facebook. New media has proven to be one of the most effective means of distributing information to employees and other stakeholders, and the agency will be using its Facebook page to distribute press releases, share stories about people in our care and the employees who have dedicated themselves to service, and more.



Fire Prevention Week: October 9-15, 2011

October 9, 2011, marked the beginning of Fire Prevention Week in the United States. Fire Prevention Week was established to commemorate the Great Chicago Fire, the tragic 1871 blaze that killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures, and burned more than 2,000 acres. The fire began on October 8, 1871, but did most of its damage on October 9.

According to popular legend, the fire broke out after a cow belonging to Catherine O'Leary kicked over a lamp, setting first the barn, then the whole city on fire. People have been blaming the Great Chicago Fire on the cow and Mrs. O'Leary for more than 130 years.

To mark Fire Prevention Week, please take the time to review fire safety practices at home and in your workplace. The New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities has several procedures on fire safety that must be practiced. Fire evacuation plans, fire drill procedures, and other fire safety-related topics should be reviewed.

Remember: fire doubles in size every minute. Fire prevention depends on all of us.



News and Information from the New York State
Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

People First



October 2011



A Letter from the Commissioner

October 12 officially marks the first six months of our administration—and it is important that amid the reforms taking hold throughout our system that we track our progress and continually review the changes we have made in order to demonstrate that we are achieving our goals.

Progress has been substantial, but a long road remains ahead, as we all partner to develop a system that really puts people first and makes New York the national model for care of individuals with developmental disabilities. And I am very pleased that we continue to receive all of the ideas, concerns, and suggestions that we do. Individuals, family members, advocates, OPWDD staff, nonprofit providers, and other stakeholders are committed to the difficult but necessary task ahead.

Next month's newsletter will discuss the critical reforms already in place, which have focused heavily on the health and safety of individuals in our care, as well as workforce excellence.

As one of our next steps, we have an obligation to recruit the best employees possible, and provide our great workforce with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

This administration will be developing and implementing new training programs and seeking innovative opportunities for employees. We will be working hard to educate all stakeholders on how the reforms affect them, and also focusing strongly on culture change: rebuilding morale throughout the field, and creating a positive environment of trust.

This is a long process. It is important that we all have realistic expectations and recognize that change does not happen overnight, but we are successfully putting the pieces in place to continue our progress—with your help.

Sincerely,

Courtney Burke, Commissioner



Program Helps Homeowners with Disabilities Access Public Transit

Continuing a commitment to help individuals with disabilities live independently, OPWDD and the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) have announced free, unlimited bus passes to Capital Region residents with disabilities who purchase a home through the agency's Home of Your Own (HOYO) program.

HOYO is open to income-qualified parents or legal guardians of people with developmental disabilities or mental illness, and to direct support professionals who provide care. The agreement, dubbed the "Homeowner Transit Use Incentive Program," will provide free, unlimited access to CDTA transit passes, as well as travel training assistance. *Continued on page 5*



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Long Island Advocates Share their Stories in Albany

In August, the "FREE Your Mind" Speaker's Bureau, a program of the Family

Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc. (FREE), visited Albany to share their stories and aspirations with Commissioner Burke and OPWDD's central office leadership. Members of the Speaker's Bureau, which is made up of several individuals with developmental disabilities—regularly visit communities throughout the state to share their stories and spread awareness about living with developmental disabilities, the importance of advocacy, and the power of positive language. Those who presented in Albany were Monique Medina, Anthony Urbano, and Sean Stuber.

They shared their experiences of living with a developmental disability and provided an inside look into their lives. Monique, Anthony, and Sean shared powerful and moving examples of what it means to persevere through the stigmas often attached to people living with developmental disabilities and to achieve their goals.

Anthony told his story of growing up in a family where he was taught that he was no different than anyone else, and he was expected to do all the things everyone else did. He now works at FREE as a full-time employee in the accounting department. Monique, who not only is a strong self-advocate, also advocates for others, and is an active member of the Bethpage Theater Program and Choir. Sean, who has overcome homelessness, had traveled to Albany as a member of the Legislative Action Committee at FREE, and recently has been asked to represent Best Buddies New York as a Community Hero. He joined the Speaker's Bureau to remind the world not to assume that everyone who has a disability is the same.

Lisa Caffrey, FREE's volunteer and advocacy coordinator, noted that "the speakers are self-advocates—the message has a much greater impact on the community when the stories come from them."

Honoring Direct Support Professionals

Marking National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week in September, OPWDD used the opportunity to promote and support the work of some of the great dedicated direct support professionals who provide care for the 126,000 individuals with developmental disabilities in our state.

In all, 27 professionals who work on the service front lines were honored by Commissioner Courtney Burke and the agency's 13 Developmental Disabilities Services Offices (DDSOs). Similar ceremonies occurred around that state that recognized the work of nonprofit provider DSPs, as well.

The celebration comes amid vast reforms at OPWDD, which include:

- Providing good employees the supports and services they need to succeed;
- Improving workforce morale and confidence throughout the agency; and
- Developing a comprehensive values-based workforce recruitment plan based on dignity, equality, and respect for every person, and a commitment to enriching the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

Commissioner Burke said, "Direct support professionals are the heart of our workforce. It is an extraordinarily challenging profession, which has incredible rewards for those committed to this service. Every day, direct support employees at OPWDD and our nonprofit providers selflessly serve others. A shared value among these professionals is a commitment to putting the interests of others above their own, as we saw with the evacuation of nearly 1,500 individuals ahead of Hurricane Irene and subsequent continuous rainfall, which resulted in insignificant flooding and widespread power loss across the state."

"I am pleased to celebrate the direct support professionals honored this year, and am committed to creating an environment in which every employee receives the supports and resources they need to be successful," she added.

This year's honorees, who are featured on the agency's first-ever online DSP Hall of Fame, are (by DDSO):

- Bernard Fineson: Michelle Pierre and Jacqueline Torrington
- Brooklyn: Kersendria Cosby and Paulette Manhertz
- Broome: Piper Ashton, Virginia Colon, and Phyllis Smith
- Capital District: Mary Hall and Robin Peacock
- Central: Paula Haley and Larry Schad
- Finger Lakes: Angie Smith
- Hudson Valley: Rebecca Konikowski and Robert Sellers
- Long Island: Jean Bien-Aimee, Alexa Brown, and Daryl Williams
- Metro NY: Jacqueline Crawford and Tracy Harris
- Staten Island: Carole Leslie and Cheryl Walker
- Sunmount: Melissa Fowler and Donna Nicklaw
- Taconic: Juanita Beals, Milissa Mahoney, and Robert "Bob" Prusakowski
- Western: Doris Engel



Love Knows No Boundaries: Bill and Taneesh's Story

Bill Mannion and Taneesh Anderson met in the summer of 1996 at a Lexington Center ARC pre-vocational program in Gloversville.

After becoming close friends they began dating and their relationship grew. After two years, the possibility of marriage came up. Uncertain about how to proceed, they asked for support from family and people at Lexington.

Lexington staff provided Bill and Taneesh the information and support they needed to help them along the way. They went through the agency's couples counseling program to learn what to expect and to discuss their mutual goals and aspirations.

They decided to first live in the same supported house and once there was an available room, Taneesh moved into Bill's home. While they maintained separate bedrooms, it gave them the opportunity to be closer and spend more quality time together. Going to the movies, dinner, and shopping became easier and Bill would even occasionally surprise Taneesh with a candlelight dinner at the house. Their love and commitment to each other continued to grow and they were certain they wanted to take the next step.

In April 2010 they were able to move into a newly-constructed supported home in neighboring Johnstown, NY, with four of their friends. Each of them was involved in the planning,

design, and decorating of their new home. Bill and Taneesh had special adjoining rooms, which let them be close to each other but still allowed for some privacy and accommodations for their special needs. Since everyone living there uses a wheelchair, everything in the house was designed to support their independence and active lifestyles.

Bill and Taneesh announced their engagement on April 4, 2010.

On August 20, 2011, on a beautiful summer day, the glowing bride was escorted down the

aisle by her father. What made this even more special was that Taneesh was able to "walk" down the aisle. Taneesh was determined to fulfill this dream, and after months of tenaciously working with her Lexington physical therapist, she was able to gain the strength and skill to get out of her wheelchair and walk a short distance.

Her dream became a reality in front of a gathering of teary-eyed family and friends.

An elegant reception followed the nuptials, which included food, dancing, and amazing memories. Bill and Taneesh Mannion's story of devotion and commitment has inspired everyone who knows them.



Sidney Harper: Living a Richer Life in Brooklyn

Sidney Harper lives with his mother in a brownstone in Brooklyn. He is a Willowbrook class member and recently started receiving Medicaid Service Coordination services through the Brooklyn DDSO.

Sidney uses a wheelchair, but has challenges getting around, as he lives in a home with multiple sets of stairs, including steep front steps, which makes it difficult for him to get out into the community.

In August, Sidney took action and visited Frank's Mobility System in New York to get an estimate for a Scalamobil, a device that will assist him in successfully navigating the stairs in his mother's home.

Sidney has not been in a day program for more than 10 years, but he recently went on a screening for a day program. He is being referred for Saturday recreation opportunities, and modification proposals for his restroom and backyard are being made so he can move about and even sit outdoors when he wants.

According to Keeva Jackson-Breland, director of service coordination at the Brooklyn DDSO, the joy that Sidney has in being able to negotiate the stairs and leave his home using the Scalamobil is incredible. And although the chair is costly, being able to be a part of the community is priceless.



IBR Receives Fragile X Syndrome Grant; Publishes Study

OPWDD's Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (IBR) has been selected to receive a \$2.2 million, four-year cooperative agreement grant from the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for research on fragile X syndrome.

The grant will be used to develop a comprehensive approach to large-scale collection and analysis of structured, longitudinal data for patients with fragile X syndrome and will bring better care to the more than 100,000 Americans affected by the condition. Fragile X syndrome is the most common known cause of inherited intellectual or developmental disability, as well as the most common known single-gene cause of autism. Approximately 4,000 males in New York State are affected by fragile X syndrome, and 1 in 250 women are carriers of this gender-linked condition.

OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke said, "This collaborative grant will provide the resources necessary to improve the care, health, and lives of individuals with fragile X syndrome, with potential benefits to other groups affected by intellectual disabilities."

IBR's 9/11 Memorial is Rededicated

Sixty IBR employees gathered the morning of September 12 to rededicate the 9/11 memorial, relocated to the visitors' entrance of the main building of the IBR campus. Constructed with funds donated by employees to IBR's Human Relations Committee (HRC), the memorial features a circular, walled bed containing a memorial stone flanked by two emerald arborvitaes and American flags. Solar lights illuminate the memorial.

HRC chair Violet Nealy, administrator of the Specialty Clinical Laboratories, welcomed attendees, thanking them for their donations toward the memorial. "It was an effort by all of IBR," she said. She extended special thanks to John Romano, a mason in the Maintenance Department, and Pamela Esposito, principal lab supervisor in the Animal Colony, for their efforts to build the memorial.

"This is IBR's chance to express our feelings about the 9/11 attacks," said IBR director W. Ted Brown, MD, PhD, to attendees. "It was a terrible event for New York and the US. It changed things. We probably all knew people who passed away that day or assisted with the recovery."

"Staten Island played a large role in the recovery from the World Trade Center attacks," he recalled. "The debris from the site was brought to the Fresh Kills Landfill on the island for recovery and identification of human remains, personal possessions, items of historical and scientific interest, and recyclable materials." The original IBR 9/11 memorial had been located outside the east wing of the research tower. It was created with funds raised in 2002 from employees by Janis Kay, a secretary in the Department of Developmental Neurobiology, now retired, and the late Danuta Dobrogowska, BA, a research scientist

in the same department. Dedicated on the first anniversary of the attacks, that memorial was relocated to the visitors' entrance in time for the 2011 commemoration so that it would be more visible to the public.

"9/11 is an event that will be with us always and that we will never forget," concluded Dr. Brown. "This is IBR's way of remembering."

A moment of silence followed.



IBR's 9/11 memorial was relocated for its rededication.

Camp Wilton Celebrates 45 Years!

By Matthew Hartwell, Camp Director

Camp Wilton, founded in 1966, was originally an offshoot program from the Wilton Developmental Center to provide a recreational outlet for the people who resided there. It has since grown into an eight-week program that provides a quality vacation experience to 450 campers annually. It serves campers from across New York State and occasionally the country. It is also one of the few programs nationally that provides services specifically for individuals with Prader-Willi syndrome.

Camp Wilton has a profound effect on the campers who attend and the staff in service there, but is also far reaching in what it provides to the families and residential staff. Long time camper Matthew L. is wheelchair bound, requires total assistance, and uses a

communication board to let his needs be known. He is cared for by his family, an aunt, his grandmother, and his grandfather, who recently passed away. Camp provided Matthew a caring, supportive, and fun experience that helped him work through the loss of his grandfather, who was an important figure in his life. It also provided his family an opportunity to handle funeral arrangements with the confidence that Matthew was being well cared for.

Camp Wilton has many campers who have been attending for years, some for 15 years, and one or two for 40-plus years. However, one thing that is especially meaningful is the experience of new campers. A number of younger people and their families have decided to give camp a try. We offered visits, tours and the opportunity for them to learn about the program before attending. Some parents chose to call during the sessions their children

attended, and we were happy to be supportive. On Friday for pick up, the responses were all the same—campers rushing to see mom and dad exclaiming, "I loved camp. We did X, Y, Z. These are my new friends." Their excitement was contagious, and that's what makes my staff and I smile—knowing that we made a difference in people's lives.

As I write this article, the games and craft supplies are packed away, along with the memories from another summer. The record of our success are those memories that the staff and campers will look back on throughout the year as we count down the days until next summer. The camp motto is "Willingly...and With Love." Anyone who has had the fortune to attend, experience or just visit camp will immediately understand why.

Wheelin' Sportsmen

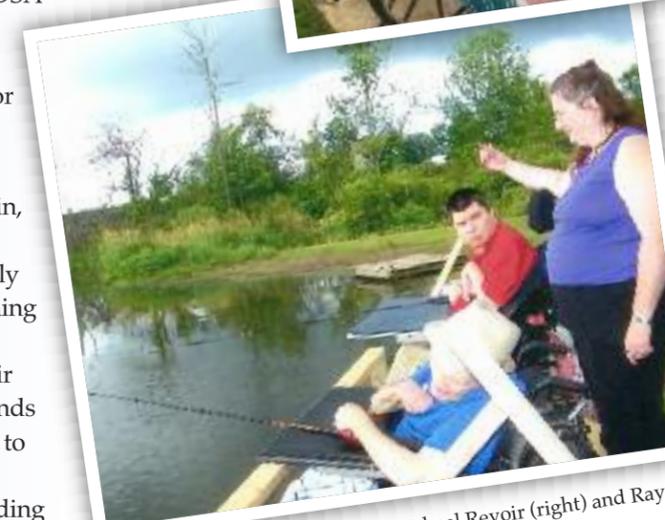
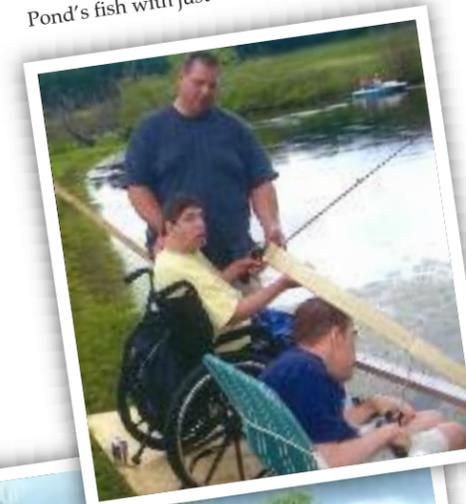
The sun was shining and the fish were biting—who could ask for more? Thanks to DSAs Cora and Orlo Spencer, five men who live in CNY DDSO's Fravor Road, Mexico residence were given the opportunity to be Wheelin' Sportsmen as they joined members of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) for a day of fishing. Cora and Orlo contacted William Wilbur, Wheelin' Sportsmen coordinator for the New York State Chapter of NWTf, to ask about a fishing event for people with disabilities. NWTf is a private, non-profit conservation and education organization founded in 1973 to conserve wild turkeys and preserve our hunting heritage. The organization has more than 250,000 members and volunteers and, along with its wildlife agency and corporate partners, have helped restore and manage North America's current population of more than 7 million wild turkeys. The Wheelin' Sportsmen is one of several NWTf outreach programs that have helped thousands of people of all abilities across North America learn outdoor skills.

Earlier this year, NWTf volunteers spent time at Spencer Pond building decks to enable people who use wheelchairs to have access to the

water—and to the fish! Members provided fishing poles, tackle, and bait. They assisted in positioning the fishermen around the pond and setting up their poles so everyone had enough space to fish safely. And they watched the smiles as the fishermen reeled in their catch—several sunfish, which fishermen Michael Revoir, Kevin Kon, Gary Cronk, Steven Dennison, and Raymond Salenski promptly released. After everyone was "fished out," guests enjoyed a barbeque picnic with NWTf members and volunteers. DA 2 Ron Reid gave special appreciation to DSA staff Orlo and Cora Spencer, Diane Finster, and Tonya Rodriguez for making the excursion possible.

Although Michael, Kevin, Gary, Steven, and Raymond had previously gone on a chartered fishing trip on Lake Ontario, somehow fishing in their own backyard with friends seemed the perfect way to spend the day and is an activity everyone, including the NWTf members, will definitely repeat next summer. Stay tuned for more fish tales!

DA 2 Ron Fravor assists anglers Steven Dennison and Kevin Kon as they tempt Spencer Pond's fish with just the right bait.



DSA Diane Finster encourages Michael Revoir (right) and Raymond Salenske to jiggle their lines to get some action.

Program Helps Homeowners with Disabilities Access Public Transit

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OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke said, "We are committed to giving individuals with developmental disabilities the support and resources they want and need to be successful in their day-to-day lives. Owning a home is not for everyone, but for those who make that decision, having ready access to reliable public transportation opens up new opportunities. I thank CDTA for their partnership and commitment to help people with disabilities to fulfill their dreams of owning a home."

Holly Pelkey of Albany, whose family has participated in this program said, "I lived in an apartment that was falling apart. My son lived in three rooms, he is wheelchair bound and the doorways were so narrow that he could not fit through them. When I found out about the housing program, it was the most amazing thing ever—it feels like a dream. This program made my son's dream of a safe and comfortable home come true. He also received a small transportation vehicle from the Make-A-Wish Foundation, which he can ride throughout the house thanks to its open space. I look forward to participating in the transportation aspect of this program as well, and

thank CDTA and OPWDD for this much-needed assistance."

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, be a first-time homebuyer, have an income and be credit worthy. OPWDD and the state Office for Mental Health (OMH) are the only agencies determining eligibility for participation in HOYO. All eligible borrowers are referred to M&T Bank, which oversees a mortgage product specifically designed to meet the needs of these target populations.

For more information about HOYO or the transit program, call 1-866-946-9733.

The LIDDSO Employee Recognition Dinner: the Must Have Ticket of the Season

By Dave Robbins

The red carpet will roll out once again on October 27 for the Long Island DDSO Employee Recognition Dinner. The dinner will be held at Villa Lombardi's in Holbrook. This is the premiere Long Island DDSO event of the fall when the organization says, "thank you," to its veteran employees with 25, 30, 35, and 40 years of service. The event is routinely sold out, as more than 300 attendees dress to the nines to step out and celebrate what it means to be a member of this family and to be engaged in our inspired line of work. Those who are not being honored come out in droves to support their colleagues.

This gala is financed through the Human Relations Committee's fundraising efforts and by donations from CSEA and PEF. As a result of these endeavors, ticket prices are kept very low. The celebration will be the result of the collaborative efforts of members of the Recognition Committee, 10 key staff who began planning the details of the occasion in August.

Everything from the printing of tickets to the photography is done by volunteers from the committee.

The party will begin with a cocktail hour that includes hot and cold buffets. A cash bar will be available throughout the evening. Award presentations will coincide with dinner, dancing, and dessert.



Villa Lombardi's, 877 Main Street, Holbrook, NY 11741, October 27, 2011, 6:45 P.M.

There is a reason why this celebration is historically such a huge success. Every year, Yolanda Sahagun, director of Human Resources, works tirelessly behind the scenes to coordinate and synchronize all the hundreds of isolated details into a balanced, joyous, and festive occasion.

It is likely the Employee Recognition Dinner will sell out early, so in order to avoid disappointment, it is recommended that interested parties reserve tickets without delay. Tickets are \$45. Please call 1-631-493-1839 for your ticket reservation.

In raising our glasses to salute our employees, we also celebrate our vital and essential work: Vivat crescat floreat—"may it live, grow and flourish."

Community Connection Enhances Share Bear Project

Moms Sandy Miller and Kim Luczak have watched their sons play sports together since the young age of 4; little did they realize how they would find yet another common bond. Sandy is a treatment team leader for CNY DDSO in Madison County. Kim is a kindergarten teacher at Stokes School in Rome. The two women spent many hours on the sidelines in all kinds of weather watching their sons Connor Miller and Josh Luczak play hockey and baseball. It was this past spring during a baseball meeting that the two mothers chatted about the importance of community service. That's when Sandy told Kim about the Share Bear Project.

The Share Bear Project was started several years ago by DA 3 Paulette Pierce and students from Cortland State College. The project's goal was to offer an opportunity for people with developmental disabilities to support others who may be going through a difficult time. The volunteers collected donated bears and other stuffed animals, attached

their own special adornments and messages, and brought them to people who would benefit from their warm spirit. Recipients included children and adults who were ill, experienced death, had a loss due to a fire, were in an accident, or just needed some sunshine. When Paulette retired, Johanna Reed, habilitation specialist at Chittenango Day Hab, stepped up to the plate as program coordinator.

As Kim learned about the project, she readily volunteered to bring the idea to her school principal. With the support of Judy Mullen, school principal, Kim was off and running. Stokes School held a "bring a bear to school day" and collected several hundred bears! At the end of the school year, Johanna, accompanied by Frankie Thompson and Jimmy Murphy, visited the school to pick up the wonderful collection of bears. To their surprise, Connor and Josh joined them to assist in loading the bears in the van. On their return trip, Johanna, Frankie, and Jimmy made one important stop at Rome Hospital—to deliver a Get-Well Wish Bear to John Gleason, CNY DDSO director, who was serving as acting

director in Broome. (John was recovering from a brief illness.) Dozens of bears are now awaiting delivery. The longtime friendship between two women spread to a positive connection whose impact would be felt throughout this small community for years to come.



Kim Luczak's kindergarten class learned all about sharing and caring as students donated stuffed animals to CNY DDSO's Share Bear Project. Kim, far left, got her students involved after hearing about the project from her friend and fellow mom Sandy Miller. Joining Kim and her students were (l to r) her son, Josh; Share Bear coordinator Johanna Reed; Connor Miller (Sandy's son); and Stokes Elementary School principal Judy Mullen. Frankie Thompson and Jimmy Murphy were on hand to collect the bears.

Extraordinary Caregivers Recognized at Sunmount DDSO

On September 12 and 13, the Sunmount DDSO hosted the Extraordinary Caregivers Recognition program sponsored by the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University. This uplifting and inspiring two-day conference is designed to recognize and support caregivers who give hands-on care to people with developmental disabilities. There were 24 participants from both the state-operated programs as well as from the voluntary agencies in the Sunmount DDSO catchment area. The conference was well received and Sunmount director Stephen DeHond awarded the participants with certificates of recognition.

On September 14, the Sunmount DDSO hosted the Recognizing and Overcoming Caregiver Depression/Fatigue program, sponsored by the School of Social Welfare at Stony Brook University. This training and education program was geared for managers, supervisors, and employees who work with people with developmental disabilities. There were 32 participants from state-operated programs, as well as from the voluntary agencies in the Sunmount DDSO catchment area. The goal of this training is to help supervisors, managers, and direct support assistants or trainees improve the services that they provide and reduce the risk of physical, psychological, and/or emotional abuse.



Taconic Talkers Take Control

Keri Mahoney, Taconic DDSO's client advocate/ombudsperson reports that the Taconic Talkers self-advocacy group is entering its 13th year of membership. The group began with only 12 members and has grown to more than 60 members this year. The members are active on many fronts and enjoy their many opportunities to network. One of the most touching moments for the group was when one of their advisors was diagnosed with breast cancer. When the advisor started chemotherapy and began to lose her hair, the group became inquisitive. The advisor was always honest with the members, answering their



questions with a positive and upbeat attitude about her treatment. The Taconic Talkers wanted to help, and they wanted to show their love and support for their friend. They began by presenting their advisor with a bouquet of flowers and a get well card. They offered their prayers. At their meetings, many members opened up and began sharing about their own health struggles. The group began a campaign to save hundreds of Dannon yogurt lids to donate for breast cancer research. Members consistently stopped by their advisor's office with lids to donate. Collecting the lids gave the members of the group a sense of control in a situation that was beyond their control. It has been over a year since their advisor began her journey and she is proud to announce that she is now cancer free! She describes the power of support she received at Taconic as overwhelming and truly a blessing. The Taconic Talkers are always glad to be of help to a friend in need.