



Get into Community

The Community... Get Into It! photo gallery and social media campaign was launched in March for National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Check out the [photo gallery](#) online, or take part on social media by telling us how you "Get Into" your community and include #community #getintoit @NYSOPWDD in your message.

A Message from the Acting Commissioner

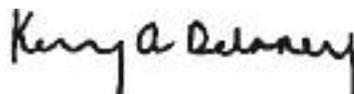
As Spring begins, OPWDD has begun developing implementation plans for the [Transformation Panel's](#) recommendations to improve our system of supports. We have a lot of work ahead of us, all made possible by the dedicated staff, providers, and family members and the vocal advocates that are such an important part of this system.

In this edition of the OPWDD newsletter, we provide budget highlights that are relevant to our service system and you will see that OPWDD spending has increased by 4.3% thanks to Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

In the early part of this year we have finalized [reports on the Transformation Panel](#), [Work Settings](#), [DSP Credentialing](#), the [Front Door](#) and the [Residential Request List](#), we launched the FIDA-IDD managed care plan option,

announced the approval of the 1915(c) Comprehensive Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver renewal, launched the "[Community Get Into It](#)" photo gallery, released the [Communities in Transition video](#) and provided a new face to our website. And there is still so much more progress to be made.

I would like to encourage all of you to engage with OPWDD on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), as well as through [email](#) so that we can keep you updated on important news and exciting enhancements being made to our system of supports. ■



Kerry A. Delaney
Acting Commissioner

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Check Out InclusiveRec.org Before Planning Your Next Trip

Spring is often the time of year when many people begin making plans for vacations, get-away excursions or other recreational activities. For individuals who have physical disabilities, however, the challenge often lies in knowing whether the desired location or activity is accessible or inclusive.

The Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (IRRC) can help. The IRRC, headquartered at SUNY at Cortland, offers a comprehensive database that describes the accessibility of various parks, recreational facilities, entertainment venues and events. The database is available online and free-of-charge to the general public.

The database is sustained and updated by students, advocates, park officials, recreation or tourism professionals and others who become Certified Inclusivity Assessors by completing IRRC's [Inclusion U Online](#). Included in the assessment is a look at physical and programmatic accessibility,

policies that facilitate participation and staff receptivity.

There are currently over 1,200 entries in the database spanning facilities in New York State, across the country and even one location in Canada. The database is searchable by geographic address, region or key words.

The IRRC was established in 2007 through a grant from the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) and established a partnership between the IRRC, the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and DDPC to promote inclusive recreation.

For more information about inclusivity training opportunities or to access the database before planning your next recreational activity, visit the IRRC website at www.InclusiveRec.org. ■





Community Cheer

Brian DiGirolamo has been an enthusiastic force on the sidelines of Cohoes High School basketball games for some two decades. Everyone knows the 43-year-old and he stops to talk to everyone. He remembers players who played 15-20 years ago and seeks them out to say hello when he notices them in the gym.

Brian also lends a helping hand with the equipment for the games and you'll often see him cheering the team on, being a part of the team sideline huddles and high-fiving the starters one by one as they are announced for the game.

"He embodies everything that we want from our players; dedication, commitment, loyalty and enthusiasm for our program. He has done this for 25 years. Cohoes Basketball would not be the same without him," said Cohoes Boys Basketball Coach Jeff Hunea. Hunea went to Cohoes High School back in the early 90's when Brian attended and has been coaching basketball there for nearly 20 years. "I have always told people that players aren't the face of our boys program, nor am I, the coach, the face of our program.

Brian is the face of the Cohoes basketball program."

Brian's presence is just as strongly felt in the girls basketball program. Cohoes JV Girls Coach, Raychel Marcil said, "Having Brian as a part of our coaching team has been extremely special for me. Brian and I have known each other for many years and I truly look forward to his smiling face at each game. His exuberance and excitement on the sidelines allows us to smile even during the most difficult games. Brian is truly amazing and we are blessed to have him on our bench!"

He's a hit with the players as well. Cohoes Varsity Girls Basketball player Riley Hansbury said, "Every game day the team looks forward to Brian running on the court and yelling, 'LET'S PLAY BASKETBALL.' No matter how much pressure is on the game, Brian gets us to smile. He is a reminder that we can only be beat mentally if we let ourselves."

When Brian is not on the sidelines rooting his teams on, he works at the Hannaford Supermarket in Latham. He says he likes his job and talking with the customers, but his favorite part is his paycheck. ■

Legislative Reports on the Transformation, Work Settings, Housing, DSP Credentialing and the Front Door

OPWDD spent much of last year initiating significant public outreach, data collection and analysis to help us better plan for a sustainable future. This outreach included statewide public forums to help inform the recommendations of the Transformation Panel and Integrated Employment forums which gave people the opportunity to provide input into integrated employment opportunities.

OPWDD also worked last year to contact every person who had indicated an interest in residential services at some point in the future through the Residential Request List to determine if they have immediate needs that must be met and help OPWDD plan for residential services. More than 24,000 outbound calls were made and more than 12,000 letters were sent out as a part of this effort.

Information, feedback and data gathered in the various public forums and from stakeholders was used to draft written reports to the Legislature. These reports provide the results of this outreach and analysis in areas such as access to services, workshop transformation, and residential services as well as lay out the Transformation Panel Recommendations and the path forward for our service delivery system. The reports are available on [OPWDD's website](#). ■



A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

When WPIX-TV (PIX 11 in New York City) interviewed Jesus Perez about his participation in the snowshoeing competition in the Special Olympics State Games that took place in the Hudson Valley in February, Jesus confidently said he would take first place.

Jesus lived up to that prediction, bringing home the gold. In fact, Jesus won two medals and was joined in the winner's circle by the rest of the Queens team whose other

members in the snowshoe competition also took first place.

The Winter Games, held this year in Poughkeepsie, featured competitions in Alpine Skiing, Cross-Country Skiing, Figure Skating, Floor Hockey and Snowshoeing, before a crowd of 1,000 athletes and coaches and hundreds of spectators and volunteers. The Winter Games are one of three annual state games and one of more than 4,000 total competitive experiences held each year throughout New York.

The 29-year-old athlete from Queens first began competing in Special Olympics in 2004 in track and field. Seven years ago, while playing in an annual basketball tournament, Queens Special Olympics Head Coach Richard Addison (who once guarded NBA legend Larry Bird) saw him on the court and was impressed by his team skills. Jesus was immediately recruited for the basketball team by the famed coach,

who has come to be his friend and mentor.

Soon basketball season ended, and Jesus quickly became bored with the extra down time, so he decided to give the softball team a try – and quickly found he was able to play any position. When softball season ended in the fall, winter set in so Jesus decided to try snowshoeing and it became his new passion. Throughout his 12 years in Special Olympics, Jesus has earned numerous gold and silver medals, often in multiple events.



Jesus looks forward to another year in Special Olympics – a great athlete and truly a man for all seasons. ■

Budget Update

The 2016-17 New York State Budget grows spending on OPWDD provided supports and services to over \$4.2 billion in the coming fiscal year, which is an increase of 4.3 percent over last year.

The new resources provided in the budget will invest \$120 million to develop new or expanded service opportunities including certified and non-certified residential opportunities, day programs, employment, case management and respite. A \$10 million portion of the new resources will specifically be made available to OPWDD Regional Offices to develop residential opportunities to support people currently living at home and have an aging parent or their

needs have recently changed, including needs identified in OPWDD's recent Residential Request List report. These resources are in addition to a separate investment of \$24 million to support 152 people expected to transition from developmental centers and intermediate care facilities to more integrated, community-based supports.

OPWDD will also receive \$15 million to develop new affordable housing opportunities to ensure the availability of safe and accessible residential options and provide capacity for people to live in their community of choice. OPWDD has successfully implemented START programs in two regions of the state and will

receive \$15 million in this budget to expand START crisis services to New York City and Long Island.

The budget provides \$7.5 million in state and federal funding to support the costs of regionally-based minimum wage increases to provider agency staff. In addition to providing funding for minimum wage increases, the Governor's budget includes funding to support a cost-of-living inflationary adjustment and Medicaid trend to increase reimbursement levels of non-profit providers. This budget also establishes a Paid Family Leave benefit beginning in 2018.

Additionally, the budget requires OPWDD to issue a report to the legislature on or before October 1, 2016 outlining the progress made in meeting housing needs and in implementing the recommendations of the Transformation Panel. ■

Check Out Our New Look!

We are sporting a new look on the home page of the [OPWDD Website](#). The new navigation will help you explore the website in a new and simpler way.

While you're there, also check out our new video entitled *Communities in Transition*. The successes we've seen as individuals make the transition to a community-based setting have been tremendous, with many people having the opportunity for more control over their lives, as well as the support and friendship of those in the community that they interact with on a daily basis. We wanted to share some of those wonderful stories of community transition with you, so you could

see for yourself the positive changes community living can make in the lives of people with developmental disabilities, and in the lives of the people around them.

Stay tuned ...we are doing a lot of work on the OPWDD website so check back often for more new improvements coming your way! ■



We Want to Hear from You!

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

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

Communications.Office@opwdd.ny.gov.

You can also follow us on Facebook at

<https://www.facebook.com/NYSOPWDD>. ■



In a Pickle... Ball

Being part of the community is an important part of everyone's life, whether you have disabilities or not.

Now kids and adults in

Cohoes, NY will have an additional opportunity to participate in sports and recreation in the community regardless of their ability. It's called the Inclusive Sports Recreation Program and is spearheaded by Katie Smith, an employee in OPWDD's advocacy services unit. Smith has been working with city officials on the program which will begin with an offering for kids...Pickleball. Pickleball is a mix of table tennis, badminton and tennis.

It's open to all residents and non-residents of all abilities ages 8-18. Smith says they hope to expand the Inclusive Sports Recreation Program in the upcoming months to include adults as well. Some additional sports expected to be offered are: basketball, bowling, golf, soccer, swimming and volleyball.

"A disability doesn't define a person. The person defines themselves by what they do and what they achieve. Communities today need to look past an individual's disability and see the wonderful things their abilities have to offer us as a community," said Smith. "Individuals with disabilities have the same goals and dreams as their family, friends and everyone else in the world. They want to feel a part of something and want to be included in all the joys of life just as everyone else does."

For more information contact Dan Hytko (518) 233-2119 ext. 2116, dhytko@ci.cohoes.ny.us or Curtis Hovey (518) 237-7523, chovey@cohoescommunitycenter.org ■



Direct Support Professional Evaluations start April 1st



Direct support professionals are the “core” of New York’s system of supports for individuals with developmental disabilities. Their jobs require technical and values-based skills that make life-changing differences in the lives of the individuals they support.

Starting April 1, Direct Support Professionals across New York State will be evaluated based on standards of the NYS DSP Core Competencies that focus on person-centered services and are grounded in ethical practice.

New York’s Talent Development Consortium, comprised of a broad range of stakeholders, constructed the Core Competencies in 2012-13 basing them on the best national practice and research over the previous 20 years. OPWDD formally adopted them in 2014 for implementation throughout the enterprise.

These competencies will bring a level of consistency and quality throughout New York State’s system. Coupled with the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals’ Code of Ethics, each DSP will understand their partnership with individuals who deserve respect, opportunities for self-expression and involvement in their communities. The Ethics, the Core Competencies and the Performance Evaluations provide standardized expectations that focus on people-first services and advance the profession of direct support.

The Core Competencies guide direct support professionals in seven goal areas: Putting People First, Building and Maintaining Positive Relationships, Demonstrating DSP Professionalism, Supporting Good Health, Supporting Safety, Having a Home, and Being Active and Productive in Society.

DSP Performance Evaluations were also created through the Consortium and OPWDD’s Administrative Memorandum #2014-03 outlines requirements, beginning April 1, for implementation of the Core Competencies, the Code of Ethics and performance evaluations.

In order to facilitate successful implementation, six Regional Centers for Workforce Transformation exist across the state to provide training, best practices, technical assistance, videos and other resources. Those materials are available at www.workforcetransformation.org.

OPWDD’s Division of Quality Improvement will begin verifying the implementation of the Code, Competencies and evaluation as of October 1, 2017.

Additional information on the NYS DSP Core Competencies and the NADSP Code of Ethics is available on the OPWDD website. ■





Celebrating Dr. King

The spirit of togetherness was evident at ARC of Rockland's 2016 Dr. Martin Luther King celebration at ARC headquarters in Congers, NY. More than 150 people attended the event which included a drum circle led by Arthur Lorde of the Motherland Rhythm Drummers, a vocal performance by the Hemlock Melody Makers led by Angel Hill, and the unveiling of an original mural created by artist Lauren Rudolph of Little Light Studio with artistic contributions by people who receive services through ARC of Rockland. ■

New Opportunities



The closure of the Brooklyn and Broome Developmental Centers signals the beginning of a new opportunity for the former residents as they settle in to their new homes. The closures are a continuation of OPWDD's move to support individuals with developmental disabilities in community settings and provide them the opportunity to live fuller and more productive lives.

The two closures are the latest in a series of four announced in July of 2013. O.D. Heck was the first to close back in March of 2015, Brooklyn Developmental Center

closed in December of 2015 and Broome Developmental Center shortly followed, closing its doors in March.

We would like to recognize the hardworking and dedicated staff that

have graced the halls of both Brooklyn and Broome Developmental Centers over these many years. Your commitment has made a tremendous difference in the lives of so many who are now moving on to experience a new chapter as neighbors, peers, friends and colleagues in their new opportunities. ■



FIDA-IDD: The Health Plan Centered Around You

Enrollment in the Fully Integrated Duals Advantage (FIDA-IDD) care coordination program began in March for people living in NYC, Long Island, Westchester, or Rockland Counties, with services beginning April 1, 2016. The FIDA-IDD program offers more opportunities to be involved in your care planning and to direct your own service plan through a care plan team. The care plan team will help you address all of your medical, behavioral, long-term supports and services, and social needs.

You are eligible to enroll if you are at least age 21, receive both Medicare and Medicaid coverage, and you receive long-term care and developmental disability services. To enroll or for more information call New York Medicaid Choice at 844-FIDA IDD or 844-343-2433 or visit www.nymedicaidchoice.com. ■

Faith Is A Part of Who We Are



While the Faith Based Community Project grant OPWDD received from the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council has concluded, individuals with developmental disabilities across New York State continue to benefit from the important groundwork laid in helping them to become valued and participating members of their faith communities.

At the culmination of the grant last fall, more than 200 spiritual leaders, congregation members, community agencies, families and individuals gathered in two locations – New York City and Utica – to explore ways to increase opportunities for faith inclusion using an understanding of cultural competency and person-centered planning.

“Faith is different for all of us; it is not a one-size fits all,” said Lenora Reid-Rose, director of cultural and linguistic competence at Coordinated Care Services, who

served as keynote presenter. “Often our faith is embodied in our culture. It is not part of holistic care; faith is about who we are.”

Conference attendees were challenged to look beyond their own comfort zones to understand others’ cultures and to use person-centered planning processes to bring about experiences important to individuals with developmental disabilities who they support. Conference presenters included members of the Spanish Action League of Onondaga County (commonly known as la Liga) and the NYC-based agency Sinergia; Katherine Smith, senior trainer and Medicaid service coordinator with All Care Provider Services; Shelly Okure, OPWDD Statewide Coordinator for Person Centered Practices; and Lida Merrill, director of spiritual life at Heritage Christian Services. Yvette Watts, executive director of the New York Association of Emerging and Multicultural Providers, moderated the conferences.

In the first years of the grant, funds were used to support initiatives at state and voluntary agencies aimed at creating training materials, developing tools to assess the spiritual goals of individuals and strengthening community networks.

In 2015, five agencies who support individuals who are Hispanic or Latino were selected to provide more extensive opportunities specifically for five individuals to become more involved in the houses of worship of their choice. The initiatives the agencies implemented varied, ranging from after-worship activities centered around food and fellowship, attendance at advocacy conferences, assistance with transportation and expenses for family members to accompany the person, and personal support to help individuals be more comfortable participating with others. One person was able to realize a long-term goal to visit the Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Canada.

Reverend Catherine Patterson, Program Coordinator of Faith Based Initiatives at OPWDD, said surveys are being compiled from 54 months of the grant, but results indicate that many individuals who participated in year 1 and 2 are still participating today in the houses of worship of their choice. “Although it is our goal that individuals are seen as valued members, it is the sustainability and their continued participation that is important,” said Rev. Patterson.

To support that, the OPWDD website offers extensive training materials and videos to spiritual leaders, agencies and staff, and individuals and families. In addition, Reverend Patterson is compiling a summary of best practices. OPWDD offers technical assistance throughout New York State to ensure that faith inclusion continues to be a part of everyday conversation among individuals, agencies, spiritual leaders and communities. For more information, visit the [OPWDD website](#). ■



Through Lauren's Lens

Lauren Bianco, 31, looks no farther than her own backyard (Moriches) and the surrounding Long Island community to feed her passion for nature and wildlife photography. Armed with a Cannon Powershot camera that her father bought for her, Lauren and her main sidekick, her mother Wendy, head for the great outdoors, regardless of the weather, in a quest for new subjects.

"I have always had an interest in wildlife. My mom and I were driving one day and came upon a herd of deer and I said I should be taking pictures of all the beautiful things I've seen," said Lauren. That was three years ago, and Lauren has never stopped seeing the world through her viewfinder. Lauren has taken some unusual and amazing photos, thanks to her patience, tenacity and dedication. Her Facebook site, Lauren's Wildlife and Nature Photography, shares more than 500 of her photographs.

Last year, Lauren entered the 50th Annual Photography Contest at Riverhead Free Library, a contest open to all photographers and judged by a panel of industry professionals. Lauren was awarded third place from 50 entries in her division and 200 overall.

When Lauren is not out shooting photos, she attends Maryhaven Center of Hope Higher Learning where she spends time learning and exploring in her community. She works with children in an arts and crafts program at Independent Group Home Living (IGHL) where she first started as a volunteer three years ago and is now an employee.

This year will mark the fourth time she has participated in Miss Exceptional Long Island, a pageant

for individuals with developmental disabilities to gain self-confidence, lasting friendships, and a one-of-a-kind memorable experience. Lauren will bring her photography to the talent portion of that event. Her platform for the pageant in the past has been raising funds for Angela's House, a nonprofit that addresses the needs of medically frail children and their families.

In addition to her passion for all things art and photography, Lauren is a strong advocate and wants to use her talents to help other people who have disabilities. With her upbeat attitude, high level of motivation, independence, self-confidence, and perseverance, she is the picture-perfect role model no matter what lens you use. ■



A Night to Shine

It was a Night to Shine, and shine they did, thanks to the unforgettable night provided by former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow and his Foundation! More than 30,000 people with special needs attended the prom-like event in February at 200 churches across 48 states and 8 countries.

New York State was home to two events this year, at Rome Alliance Church held at the Delta Lake Bible Conference Center in Rome and at St. Malachy's Roman Catholic Church in Times Square in New York City. The Tim Tebow Foundation provided each church with financial support, a detailed instruction manual, a prom kit complete with decorations and gifts for the guests, and individualized staff guidance. Hundreds of volunteer hours transformed the night – and the days leading up to it – into one that will be remembered and cherished for years to come.

Guests begin preparing long before the big day, shopping for just the right attire, arranging for alterations if needed, selecting their make-up, and honing their dance moves. In Rome, several ladies gathered at the administrative offices where staff and volunteers helped them get



dressed, styled their hair, polished their nails and fastened their jewelry.

Every guest of Night to Shine enters the venue on a red carpet complete with a warm welcome from a cheering crowd and friendly paparazzi. Attendees are each paired with a volunteer host who helps ensure they have a good time by engaging in conversation and dancing. 2016 marked the second year of this event. ■



Shannon and Tom: Alike and Unique



Shannon Stuart and Tom Cameron have quite a few things in common.

Both are Rome residents; Tom has lived in the small city in upstate all his life, while

Shannon moved to the Utica-Rome area in 1977. They are about the same age: Tom is 49 and Shannon is 53. Both are fair-haired and blue-eyed. Both are somewhat soft spoken and quiet. They both enjoy exercise and physical activity. And they both have autism.

But having autism doesn't stop Shannon or Tom from doing the things they love. Shannon attends day habilitation through the Arc, Oneida-Lewis Chapter, NYSARC where she socializes with her friends, enjoys exploring the community and looks forward to coffee breaks! In the evenings and weekends, Shannon can be found riding her exercise bicycle in her basement or taking karate lessons at the local studio; she has been



taking karate for years and has earned a green belt. Recently, Shannon began attending Zumba classes. She enjoys shopping, especially for pretty clothes, and helps with the cooking. Shannon prefers to watch television shows she grew up with, like Happy Days, the Brady Bunch, and Star Trek. She likes to dance and recently became a member of the fan club for the band Flame.

Tom had worked for the Rome Daily Sentinel for 11 years, putting advertising inserts in the newspapers. A few years ago, the newspaper automated that task and Tom lost his job. He began exploring other possibilities through Job

Connections, the employment program of OPWDD's State Operations Office in Region 2. He worked at various locations assembling decorative floral arrangements, performing general maintenance, scanning documents and other office work. Presently he is enrolled in OPWDD's Pathway to Employment. He is exploring a work experience in the Human Resources Office for Rome Memorial Hospital doing filing in their records room. Tom works very independently reviewing each record before filing it alphabetically. Tom is considering working in patient transport at Rome Memorial Hospital or trying a new experience at the Fort Stanwix National Park. He enjoys going out for a fish fry with his friends or parents. And, like Shannon, he has

taken karate for several years. He is excellent at most sports including basketball, track and field, and bocce, but he excels at bowling with scores in the 150s.

Although autism affects Shannon and Tom differently, each has overcome the deficits brought on by the disorder and have capitalized on their own strengths and unique abilities to lead fulfilling lives.

April was Autism Awareness Month. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development characterized by social-interaction challenges, communication difficulties and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors. Symptoms and their severity vary widely. As many as one in every 68 children fall somewhere on the autism spectrum, according to a recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Of the 128,000 individuals with developmental disabilities OPWDD supports, approximately 23,000 have autism or ASD. OPWDD is committed to increasing both the effectiveness and capacity of its supports for individuals and families faced with autism and ASD. ■





Career Opportunities

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For more information:

Central Office, Office of Human Resources:

1-866-946-9733

or OPWDD.Human.Resources@opwdd.ny.gov

NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)
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