

## Giving Credit to Nonprofits That Go Above and Beyond

Like OPWDD employees, the nonprofit providers that help the agency carry out its mission do exceptional work. Some, however, go above and beyond the call of duty. To honor our great nonprofit providers, OPWDD has now put its Compass initiative on the agency's website, which publicly highlights those provider agencies that have progressed beyond minimal regulatory compliance and have achieved excellence in service delivery. We will be updating this site regularly. Please visit [www.opwdd.ny.gov/compass/index.jsp](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/compass/index.jsp) to learn more about Compass agencies.



Photo by Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

### Nonprofit Provider's Pet Therapy Makes a Difference

Every Thursday morning, Rita Wagner and her two dogs, Widget and Josie, visit the residents at Lifetime Assistance in Brockport for therapy sessions.

Since 1970, animal therapy has assisted individuals with developmental disabilities in their therapy, providing them opportunities to socialize and build confidence. Animal therapy has long been thought to serve as a comfort to those in physical or emotional pain, and a cure for loneliness. Lou Katz, director of Lifetime Assistance, noted that "it has been proven that within minutes of petting your animal, your blood pressure goes down."

Augie Iannello (pictured), a resident at Living Assistance, has been receiving pet therapy for a number of years. Augie lives

with spastic quadriplegia and cerebral palsy, and is often contracted, which makes it harder for him to engage in activities. Interaction with Rita's certified therapy dogs often relaxes him, and he remains in a relaxed state when he watches others interact with Widget and Josie.

The physical benefits of Augie's sessions with the dogs are not the only improvements staff notice in him. Widget and Josie have also given Augie something else—the chance to interact with peers. Sherri Ainsworth, associate director of day services for Lifetime Assistance, noted that "the dogs have really brought out some personality in our folks that we have never been able to see before."

Augie also has learned to share time with the dogs with other residents. This has helped him to build social relationships with his peers, and has given him a boost of self-confidence, as well.

Pet therapy is not only a method of bringing companionship to individuals undergoing therapy, but it also humanizes health care. Among seniors, pet therapy reduces boredom and anxiety. For children, the benefits are equally great. Interaction with pets teaches gentleness, caring, and allows people to love a pet.

### Theater Group Uses Performing Arts for Therapy

For 15 years, the Civic Pride Community (CPC) Players, a part of the Cerebral Palsy of New York State's day program at the Jerome Belson Center (JBC) in the Bronx, have been entertaining their friends and neighbors.

Created in the 1990s, this incredible program has incorporated theater and art into its therapeutic practices. Comprised of 12 core members, and anyone else who is interested in participating, the group uses art, design, and music to teach practical skills. This is a practice that Ira Goldberg, the program's administrator, says has had many great successes for everyone involved.

The productions that CPC Players have performed include fashion and talent shows, as well as holiday spectaculars. These shows are created from the participants' imaginations and offer many ways for them to get involved. Whether it is from a technical standpoint or artistic support, these productions have performed miracles of sorts with program participants.

Produced as a team effort, the productions bring an immense source of pride to the members, as well as parents, siblings, and residential providers.

Excited about their upcoming move into an expanded facility outfitted with an auditorium that features a large stage, lighting, and a sound system, the program hopes to continue to grow so the CPC Players can become a fully functional theater group.



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

# People First



September 2011

### A Letter from the Commissioner



Although many OPWDD and nonprofit provider employees are reminded every day of their important work by the smiles on the faces of the people we support, I would like you to know how much we value this good work. And nowhere was this hard work and commitment more evident than during Tropical Storm Irene.

Thousands of OPWDD and nonprofit provider employees showed how incredible our workforce is, joining forces to undertake an unprecedented evacuation of more than 1,200 individuals from

sites in low-lying areas. With communities statewide significantly impacted, these people took on enormous challenges, such as massive flooding and widespread loss of power, and kept those in our care safe from harm.

This endeavor included not only people, but also beds, food, medical equipment, and other supplies required to safely care for individuals with multiple needs. Evacuations began immediately to avoid traffic issues from the closure of certain roads, bridges, and New York City's mass transit system. Their amazing efforts continued well after the storm passed.

Because of the values held by the vast majority of our employees—the commitment to dignity, equality, and respect, and the willingness to go well above and beyond the call of duty to help every individual—the people we are privileged to serve have greater opportunities.

As I travel the state, it is clear that despite significant media scrutiny and the vast changes taking place, our workforce remains committed, and continues to share concerns and suggestions about how we can continue to improve our services and meet challenges head on.

That dedication is recognized by others, as well. Recently, Douglas Ertel, the brother-in-law of national pollster and political pundit John Zogby, passed away. For more than 50 years, Doug was cared for by this very workforce. As Mr. Zogby notes, Doug "really loved his other family, the staff at his group home." Those workers also "loved him and wept openly when they knew he would pass."

Mr. Zogby wrote a moving editorial this month in *Forbes* magazine, which we have included in this newsletter, about Doug and those who provided his care. We have also dedicated a section to a few of the many inspiring stories from the storm.

Sincerely,

Courtney Burke  
Commissioner



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## Anthony Bruno named OPWDD Director of Investigations and Internal Affairs

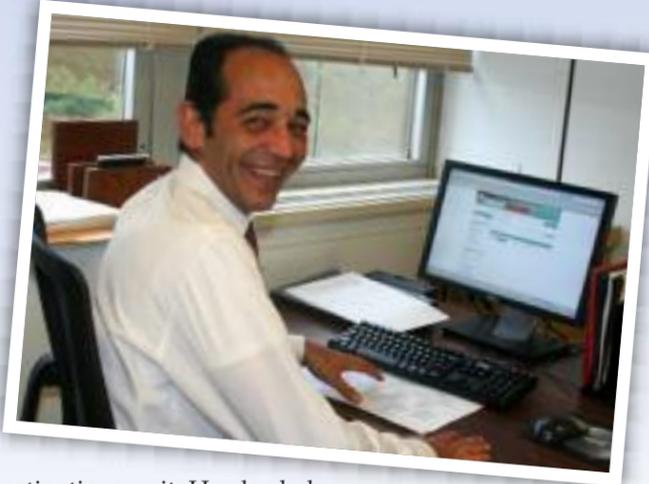
Commissioner Burke has announced that not only have investigations been centralized to ensure consistent oversight and accountability at OPWDD, but that Anthony “Tony” Bruno, a 20-year veteran of the City of Albany police force, has accepted the critical position of director of investigations and internal affairs at the agency.

Prior to joining OPWDD, Bruno was the assistant chief of police. He also served as a detective in the former juvenile unit and in the criminal investigations unit, and as detective sergeant, detective lieutenant, and commander in the internal affairs and investigations unit. He also led the effort to get video cameras placed in Albany’s police cruisers.

“Protecting those we serve and holding accountable those who compromise their safety is our obligation,” said Commissioner Burke in announcing Bruno’s position. “For the first time, OPWDD will have a centralized and robust investigations process that ensures the sound and consistent investigation of every allegation of abuse and neglect, as well as the mandatory reporting of potentially criminal incidents to legal authorities.

She added, “These changes give the agency the tools we need to protect individuals in our care. Tony has an exceptional record of reform and I am confident that not only will he be a great investigations chief, but he will constantly be looking for ways to improve the system.”

“It is a privilege to be able to serve the individuals in OPWDD’s care, and see that the agency is doing everything in its power to keep people safe,” said Bruno. “Under Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Burke’s direction, OPWDD is changing dramatically. I look forward to this challenging opportunity and am resolved to always finding new ways we can better serve individuals with developmental disabilities and their loved ones.”



## Central New York Delivers Meals on Wheels

Much like the US Postal Service, the foursome of Christine Bowman, Shaheim Davis, Gary Spinner, and long-time senior companion Cathy Gilbert can be counted upon to deliver!

This foursome is one of a few groups of individuals, staff, and volunteers that support Meals on Wheels through Fair Lakes Day Habilitation in Central New York. They have been delivering meals to 15 people throughout the region every Monday and Wednesday for four years.

Giving back to the community is important to the Central NY DDSO, which has made Meals on Wheels a big part of its community service. Some sites have been participating for 15 years. The delivery usually takes about two hours each morning and, in nicer weather, is followed by lunch in the park or another community setting.

While those who receive the meals rely on the service, they also very much look forward to the visits. Often, recipients are elderly or homebound, and regular visits make a big difference in their lives, as well as in the lives of those delivering the meals.

At a recent volunteer recognition luncheon, the Meals on Wheels of Syracuse paid tribute to the team, led by new addition, habilitation specialist Josh Reif, for four years of great service.

## Connor McEvoy Enjoys the College Experience

Down syndrome hasn’t stopped 21-year-old Connor McEvoy from his dreams of an education and a college experience—and he has found it through the College Experience Program (CEP) at the College of Saint Rose in Albany.

The College Experience Program is one of the ways provider agencies realize OPWDD’s mission to help people with developmental disabilities live richer lives.

Living Resources, a provider in Albany, along with College of Saint Rose president Dr. R. Mark Sullivan and dean of Saint Rose’s College of Education, Dr. Maggie Kirwin, created a program unlike any other in upstate New York. In the fall of 2005, in collaboration with OPWDD and its Options for People Through Services (OPTS) program, CEP was born.

CEP is only one of a handful of academic programs in the country serving the developmentally disabled population over the age of 21. CEP is a two-year certificate program where students have the opportunity to attend college, with the goal of transitioning into independent adult life, through accommodated instruction that addresses students’ needs for practical life, social, and work skills.

Connor attended Hoosick Falls Central School District and had great teachers, according to his parents, Thomas and Ann McEvoy. He attended his junior prom. He has always been naturally smart and outgoing, so college was the logical next choice.

“We knew he had to move on and CEP was perfect for him,” Thomas McEvoy said. “We learned about the program through word of mouth and then we visited Saint Rose. Connor was eager to go to college just like his brothers, friends, and classmates.”

Connor applied to the program and was accepted. He moved into a shared apartment where he lived for two

years, graduating in May with his Certificate of Achievement from the College of Saint Rose.

Learning isn’t limited to classrooms; residential life is full of lessons that help students become increasingly independent and capable members of the community. Living in off-campus housing near the college, students determine their own goals and work with staff that help them achieve those goals, including cooking and meal planning, money management, travel training, and medical management.

Another integral part of CEP is the students’ involvement in campus life. The students regularly attend events both on and off campus with the general student population, from concerts and sporting events to lectures and festivals. Several CEP students have joined campus clubs and organizations, including those which require extensive time and commitment, such as the Student Association, SADD, the Golden Knights Dance Club and the Student Events Board.

CEP gives its students an excellent foundation for life after graduation. The program’s goals are for graduates to live in an apartment with minimum support, to financially support themselves by working a full- or part-time job, and to be able to plan and engage in an active social life with friends.

Connor recently moved into an apartment in Albany and is in a supportive living program with Living Resources. He volunteers in the Sage College Admissions Office and is working with Living Resources to find employment.

“I cannot say enough about how much this program does for its students,” Thomas McEvoy said. “It offers academics, culture, life skills, and wellness—it is just fantastic.”

## Joe and Ronnie: 33 Years Together

Former Letchworth Village residents, Joe and Ronnie, recently celebrated their 33rd wedding anniversary.

reception given by a mutual friend. Today, they live in a modest one-bedroom apartment in Nanuet—where they have been for almost 29 years. Their apartment is decorated with Elvis Presley memorabilia, portraits of themselves throughout their years together, and photos of family and friends. They note that they have had their share of ups and downs like any married couple, but remain devoted to each other and are still very much in love.

Active members of their community for many years, Joe and Ronnie have formed close relationships with many friends and neighbors. Their friends assisted them in getting the help they needed to live in the home and in the community of their choice. Ronnie belongs to the Salvation Army and participates in its Women’s Home League. They both attend the senior day program at Northern Metropolitan Habilitation Center, going on weekly trips and making friends with the other participants. They enjoy listening to music and watching movies from their large DVD collection.

OPWDD’s vision is to provide individuals with choice over their lives, and the resources people need to be successful. Joe and Ronnie inspire all of us by living lives of distinction.



Brought to Letchworth

Village in 1942, when he was five years old, Joe lived and worked on the campus and eventually “graduated” to day work doing landscaping in North Rockland. Eventually, he was able to move into the community, working several jobs until meeting Ronnie in 1976 through a mutual friend.

Ronnie came to Letchworth when she was 12, after an aunt could no longer care for her. She was placed first in family care and then was transferred to Long Island and Queens before returning to Rockland County with her sister.

Ronnie and Joe were married on July 30, 1978 in the Methodist Church on Main Street in Spring Valley, with a

# Weathering the Storm

Tropical Storm Irene significantly impacted communities statewide. Massive flooding and widespread loss of power have presented enormous challenges to OPWDD and its nonprofit providers, which have the responsibility to ensure the safety of every individual in our care.

The response of employees and nonprofit providers throughout the system, before, during, and after the storm has been incredible. Because of their efforts, under the direction of Governor Cuomo, we were well prepared and individuals in our care remained safe.

To honor the thousands of employees statewide who demonstrated remarkable perseverance throughout these trying weeks, we have compiled a few stories of the great work that occurred. We've received many inspirational stories, and although we are not able to print all of them in this edition, we will continue to share them in the weeks ahead.

## Taconic DDSO Employees Help Keep Campers Safe

Soon after the storm, Taconic DDSO sent maintenance staff to Camp Harriman in Greene County, which experienced significant storm damage, to evaluate a road that had been washed out. Camp Harriman, run by nonprofit provider AHRC NYC, was hosting 49 individuals with developmental disabilities and more than 60 staffers when the storm hit.

Taconic employees Frank Papp and Daryl Brevi went to the location, where they found total devastation. Not only was one bridge and road washed out, another bridge was impassable for vehicles. Frank and Daryl walked more than a mile through mud and flooded land to the campsite, where they found everyone safe and secure thanks to AHRC staff. Daryl and Frank were able to assist the caretaker of the property, Joe Dibble, with getting spare propane cylinders to the emergency generator so the camp could maintain emergency power. These two gentlemen were also able to get contact names and phone numbers from Greene County personnel working on the roads and bridges so that Capital Support Services could continue to coordinate the repairs and evacuation plans of the people stranded at the camp.

Through the efforts of OPWDD and AHRC staff and local officials, everyone was able to safely leave the site mid-week.

Taconic DDSO director John Mizerak also opened the doors of Taconic's Wassaic campus to about 100 local

residents who were at risk of flooding. With assistance from the Red Cross and the local Lions Club, the community members remained safe.

Mizerak received accolades from Town of Amenia supervisor Wayne Euvrard, who sent Mizerak a letter thanking him for opening the Red Cross shelter for the town residents. "It's wonderful when we can all come together as a community and help one another through such difficult times. We are thankful that we weathered the storm as well as we did," Euvrard wrote.

## Hudson Valley Employees Evacuate Dozens Amid Rising Waters

Jennifer Kovacs, a residential habilitation coordinator at Hudson Valley shared this incredible story about some of her colleagues.

Alicia Botero Mendoza walked to work despite the road being closed to help individuals and fellow staff through Tropical Storm Irene. The water rose rapidly at Mid Hudson 1, where Alicia works with Jean Alcenat, Maureen Chambers, and Damian Green. They were ready, but nothing could have prepared Alicia and her colleagues, and neighboring Mid Hudson 2 employees Fredline Bethelmy, Wendy Jones, Stacey Scott, and Arron Vandike for what would prove to be an unforgettable day.

Despite being exhausted, staff still on duty from the prior afternoon were ready to do whatever it took to get the individuals living in these two residences out safely.

Seeing water rapidly flooding the area in the back of both residences, staff called firefighters for assistance. Twenty-eight people remained in both houses, seven of whom are wheelchair bound, as well as others who are blind and unable to walk without assistance.

Alongside local firefighters, employees carried the residents through rain, wind, and waist-high moving water to evacuate them into nearby boats. Not a single individual suffered even a scrape during the evacuation.

Streets around the site were closed, including nearby Fulton Street, which was destroyed by sink holes and flooding. After the individuals were safe, Wendy Jones made countless trips back to the Mid Hudson residences to retrieve vans full of supplies, and moved as many state and employee vehicles as she could before having to return to safety herself.

The individuals who live at these two residences are now back in their homes, thanks to these same employees. Dozens of similar evacuations occurred throughout the Hudson Valley and Taconic DDSOs, successfully, thanks to OPWDD and nonprofit employees.

## Bernard Fineson and Brooklyn DDSOs Join Forces During Storm

On the Friday before the storm, the Brooklyn DDSO was ordered to evacuate the Brooklyn campus in anticipation of Hurricane Irene. The planning and logistics of moving 260-plus individuals along with all the staff, food, medications, mattresses, adaptive equipment, and other necessities was

quite a task. Individuals would be moved to the Bernard Fineson DDSO until the storm had passed.

Knowing that large-scale evacuations would cause traffic concerns, Brooklyn staff got to work immediately. By Saturday afternoon, everyone had evacuated except for a safety officer, sergeant, and one person in Brooklyn's staffing office, which remained open throughout the weekend.

Bernard Fineson staff ensured that all individuals had a mattress, linens, a pillow, and their personal belongings. To help people remain calm, Brooklyn staff held spontaneous karaoke sessions, pajama discos, and board game competitions, amid lots of laughter.

Naturally, some of the residents had difficulties throughout Saturday and early Sunday given the move, coupled with the high intensity of the winds and the rain. The dedicated employees from both DDSOs, many of whom had been working very long hours to safely carry out the evacuation, helped alleviate fears. By Sunday afternoon the RIT, LIT, and individuals who are medically frail were able to return home to Brooklyn; the MDU and DC individuals returned Monday morning.

Residents at Bernard Fineson's Crown Street home also extended a helping hand and opened their home to Brooklyn residents, offering the use of their recreation area. The staff and residents at Crown Street were excited about the opportunity to take in three residents, Michael, Martin, and Dotson, along with one staff member, Fay.

Leading up to the storm, Bernard Fineson was asked to help the individuals residing at the Brooklyn DC campus with their evacuation process. The residents engaged in conversation to get through the storm, sharing their stories. Michael, Martin, and Dotson fit in the home so well that Rodney noted that "these guys seem to have lived here a long time." They were able to return home on Monday, having made several new friends.

## Long Island DDSO Toughs it Out

Quick response and dedication by the staff at the Long Island DDSO helped ensure that the residents remained as safe and comfortable as possible while the storm knocked out power, leaving many without electricity. Long Island was especially hard hit by widespread power loss.

Pat Beckley, Long Island's emergency command center coordinator, quickly responded on Saturday to get the center up and running. He stayed on site 30-plus hours, traveling with the safety officers from Albany, clearing trees and other debris. He also worked with the state security staff and fire safety personnel that came from the other DDSOs in order to respond to immediate emergencies on Sunday.

Like many OPWDD and nonprofit employees throughout the storm, Pat made an enormous sacrifice, as he had to leave his family and his obligations as a firefighter and emergency responder in his home community of Massapequa to coordinate all aspects of emergency response and command center operations.

Doug Motley, another Long Island employee, went in to work during the height of the storm at 7 am on Sunday, because he knew that some of the staff at his home had already been working two to four shifts. He had to travel through fallen trees and electrical hazards to reach the site. He advocated for his residents, who wanted to stay at home and not brave the inclement weather, and he went out of his way to get ice to preserve the food and ensure that the residents were safe and comfortable. When safety personnel arrived, Doug showed them areas that needed immediate attention because of the health and safety factors for the residents.

Thanks to these men and countless other staff and volunteers, the residents remained comfortable and their lives weren't too disrupted during Irene.

## Roosevelt Island IRA Evacuates

Residents of Roosevelt Island, off Manhattan's east side, learned in the days leading up to Irene that they were in a "level B" evacuation zone. But unlike other level B zones, Roosevelt Island residents were surrounded by the East River. To ensure the safety of the 12 individuals and the staff at the Roosevelt Island IRA, Richard, the house manager, immediately began preparations, which included having enough food and supplies on hand, and making sure everyone was prepared for high winds that could damage the site.

As the storm moved over New York City, police informed the IRA that high tide could flood the only road and bridge off the island. Richard was immediately on the phone, requesting evacuation to a group home not in a flood zone. To help some of the residents who struggled with leaving their home, staff ensured that their most prized personal belongings were safely packed. Within an hour and a half, everyone was organized and safely evacuated!

*Commissioner Burke and members of OPWDD's leadership team help with storm cleanup in the North Country*



## A Tribute to Douglas Ertel and the State Workers who Made his Life a Little Easier

By John Zogby

*Originally printed in Forbes magazine*

Douglas Ertel passed away on Aug. 6. He was 59 years old and you have never heard of him. He was my wife's younger and loving brother—and for the past 52 years was, in technical terms, a “ward of the state.” Severely mentally retarded, he was placed in a New York State dormitory facility at the age of 7 because his family had no other options for his care in the 1950s. Since 1998, he was a resident of an independent residential alternative group home.

Doug loved chocolate, *I Love Lucy*, and *The Three Stooges*. And above all he loved his sister, Kathy. I shared all of these loves with him. Kathy visited him often and he came to our home several times. Nothing was more magical than to see him smile (especially when I was directly behind him and could see his cheeks fold upwards) when he heard Kathy's voice. Doug was a jokester—his sense of humor was actually remarkable. One time he was having a conversation with a fellow resident and could not hear what the other fellow was saying. Suddenly, Doug blurted out, “What's wrong with you, can't you speak English?”

Doug also really loved his other family, the staff at his group home. They fed and clothed him, played his silly

games, watched *Lucy* and Will Ferrell movies with him. He was felled by a serious stroke in 1995 that left him paralyzed and unable to walk or use his left hand. We nearly lost him then but he awoke from a coma after a few weeks and triumphed in his own way. He stayed cheerful, feisty, talkative, and loving.

He took a turn for the worse in late July and was in a hospital room for his last days. The group home staff took turns at all hours of the day to visit him, advocate for him, and talk to him. They came and stayed hours on their own time before and after work. They sat with Kathy who stayed at his bedside nonstop. They loved him and wept openly when they knew he would pass.

It is so fashionable to bash “state workers,” to hate unions, to tell isolated favorite stories of nameless bureaucrats who earn too much, have benefits that many of us do not have (and for which we are paying), who carp endlessly about grievances on the job, and are mean to us who are simply looking for basic customer service. This stereotypical state worker never entered Doug's life. He was blessed with state-funded caretakers who were folks who loved him as much as we did.

And they have names like Katy, Lisa, Frank, Sandy, Colleen, Brian, Marie, and Lynn. There are many more, too. Kathy tells me how heartbreaking it was for her (at age 8) and her parents to

have Doug moved from his family home into a state facility. It still haunts her to this day. Through much of his life he was in a dormitory facility and the heartbreak would be relived each Sunday (without fail) when they all came to visit. Geraldo Rivera may be a controversial and at times polarizing figure, but he exposed the horrible abuses, unsanitary conditions and overcrowding at the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island, NY, in the 1970s. It was Geraldo's important work that led to necessary reforms in our treatment of thousands of people like my brother-in-law. We should all be grateful that the state governing system responded with a more humane and effective program of group homes, day clinics, and outpatient services.

State budget cuts are a necessity. To be sure, some state workers in New York and throughout the country are whiners and out of touch with citizens who foot the bill. But Doug Ertel was served by the best people imaginable, and for that Kathy and I give thanks. Blogs are great for venting (ranting) about ideologies, one-size-fits-all solutions, and the nameless “other guy.” Please don't forget about Doug and all the wonderful employees of the State of New York, who were there for him around the clock. And please don't forget the families who continue to face tough decisions like the ones the Ertels confronted. Thankfully, someone is there to help.

## Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Burke, and State Police Announce Joint Protocol for Reporting Abuse

Bringing long overdue clarity to the incident reporting process, in August Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, Commissioner Burke, and the New York Division of State Police announced plans to establish consistent guidelines for which incidents of abuse against any of the 126,000 individuals receiving support from OPWDD and its network of nonprofit providers should be reported as potential crimes.

This joint protocol is another step in a comprehensive agenda being pursued by the Governor and Commissioner Burke to assure the safety of individuals and ensure employees have

**A report to law enforcement is to be made in instances such as:**

- Intentional hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking, hurling, strangling or shoving of an individual receiving services by a staff member;
- Any sexual contact that occurs between a person receiving services and an employee;
- Any sexual contact that occurs between two persons receiving services in which one person uses force or coercion;
- Any situation where a staff member knowingly fails to act or acts in a

in our comprehensive plan for a government which runs better in a cost-effective way.”

Commissioner Burke said, “This reform ensures that those who engage in criminal conduct against individuals in our care are held accountable through consistent reporting to law enforcement. Governor Cuomo has directed state entities to partner on matters of shared interest, and this agreement with the State Police provides the employees and individuals within our system the confidence in knowing what is clearly expected of them and that criminal action will be taken against those who engage in criminal behavior.”

The directors of OPWDD's 13 regionally-based Developmental Disabilities Services Offices (DDSOs), as well as executive directors of nonprofit provider agencies, will partner with their local law enforcement entities to develop consistent procedures for reporting incidents—including how reports are processed and incidents are investigated, as well as designating a staff liaison for local law enforcement. OPWDD will provide training to recruits and other members of the State Police Academy regarding the challenges of interviewing witnesses and investigating crimes against people with developmental disabilities.

For incidents in which there is a question on whether law enforcement should be involved, a designated member of the State Police's Bureau of Criminal Investigations Special Victims Unit will assist in a review. This individual will participate in meetings with local State Police units to provide guidance in the development of reporting procedures.

“This cooperative agreement between OPWDD and the State Police will strengthen care and protections for individuals with developmental disabilities, and is another step forward in our comprehensive plan for a government which runs better in a cost-effective way.”

—Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

the information and resources to do their job effectively and report abuse.

Ann Scherff, the parent of a child with developmental disabilities from Western New York, said, “A parent's biggest concern, the thing that keeps us awake at night, is the safety of our children and whether the people providing their care are as equally concerned. I am very pleased to see all of the reforms occurring at OPWDD, but this one in particular, because it is a big step in the right direction. It is important that we always focus on how to improve the system, the care available to our children, and the policies and procedures that are in place to hold bad apples accountable. I thank Governor Cuomo, Commissioner Burke, and Superintendent D'Amico for their hard work, but above all, for listening.”

manner that is injurious to the physical or mental welfare of an individual unable to care for himself or herself;

- Any instance where a person dies in a manner in which the cause of death is unknown, or in which the individual is not under the care of a physician and the death is not due to natural causes; and
- Theft and property crimes against people receiving services.

“Government programs operate effectively and provide better services for taxpayers when they work together,” Governor Cuomo said. “This cooperative agreement between OPWDD and the State Police will strengthen care and protections for individuals with developmental disabilities, and is another step forward

## New Workforce Recruitment Site for Direct Support is Live

Direct support professionals are the heart of our workforce. The job is very challenging, but also very rewarding—and is definitely not meant for everyone.

If you or someone you know wants a career in which you can really make a difference in people's lives, and you recognize the worth of each person and treat everyone with dignity, equality, and respect, learn more about how to become a direct support professional at [www.opwdd.ny.gov/careers/index.jsp](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/careers/index.jsp).

