

IN THIS ISSUE



Acting Commissioner Ted Kastner

Who is Dr. Kastner?

Dr. Kastner, or Ted as he prefers to be called, is the new Acting Commissioner of OPWDD. He completed undergraduate studies at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, attended medical school at the University of Connecticut in Farmington and later earned a master of science degree from the University of Wisconsin School of Preventive Health.

What is the Acting Commissioner’s professional background?

After attending medical school, Ted worked at Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx (1981 to 1984) and later completed a fellowship at the Rose F. Kennedy Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine in developmental behavioral pediatrics.

For 11 years he worked at Morristown Memorial Hospital in New Jersey where he directed the Center for Human Development and built and researched an integrated primary care/mental health practice for people with developmental disabilities.

In 1998 he founded Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance, which brought the health care practice model to scale, operating seven offices across the state. At one point the Alliance served more than 4,000 people with disabilities, about 40% of all individuals eligible for Medicaid Waiver services in New Jersey. It also provided care management to 5,200 individuals with disabilities enrolled in United Health Care.

In 2013 Ted was a founding member of an I/DD Accountable Care Organization – a shared savings arrangement for people with developmental disabilities who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid in New York City.

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Undisputed Champions

Boxing is a sport that is often associated with winning and losing, hitting and ducking, bobbing and weaving.

But athletes who participate in the sport will tell you it’s much more than that.

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Undisputed Champions



Boxing is a sport that is often associated with winning and losing, hitting and ducking, bobbing and weaving.

But athletes who participate in the sport will tell you it's much more than that. Former professional boxer Javier Martinez and Tom Schreck, Director of Communications at Wildwood Programs, an agency that supports people of all ages who have developmental disabilities, wanted to bring the real-life lessons learned in boxing to people the agency supports, and six years ago Wildwood's boxing program began.

"Boxing gives people a chance to exercise and become more physically fit," said Schreck, who is a professional boxing judge and self-proclaimed boxing gym rat. "This program also teaches athletes about discipline, following direction and respecting others."

Twice a year, a dozen people ages 18-21 attend the rigorous 10-12-week training program that takes place at Schott's Boxing in Albany.

Martinez serves as lead instructor as they work out for 90 minutes pummeling heavy bags, working on upper-cuts and jabs and shadowboxing. And Martinez shows the young athletes no mercy as he expects 110 percent from each and every participant. He calls out instructions, guides everyone through the drills, and provides encouragement. The program's mantra, "Relax...focus...adjust," applies inside the ring and outside in life.

"I thought the idea of teaching boxing to individuals with special needs was revolutionary. I had never heard of it being done before," said Martinez. "But as soon as we got started, I didn't see any difference between teaching this class or teaching any of the other classes where I have coached. And I still don't see differences today. Staff tell me some people show incredible progression in how they follow instruction, pay attention and work hard, but what I see are athletes who work hard and rise to the



challenge. And the connection between the athletes and our volunteer coaches is magical."

In addition to working with Martinez, who is now a Colonie police officer, the athletes work out with volunteer coaches, many of whom they have met at the gym. Among the volunteers are lawyers, restaurant owners, businessmen, police officers and a former mixed martial arts fighter. Most have never had experience working with people with disabilities.

Patrick Noonan, restaurateur and owner of El Loco and Debbie's Kitchen in Albany, was looking for a way to give back to the community. Schreck told him about the boxing program, and Noonan was immediately interested. "As a businessman, I am frequently asked to serve on committees and make donations. Those are very important, and I am happy to do so," Noonan said, "but this program lets me give back in other important ways, too. It is very rewarding to me personally. I've never been involved in anything like this."

Mark Burnett, founder of Hope Soars, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2007. He founded a boxing program, Fighting Parkinson's, also at Schott's, and is a volunteer coach. "I am happy to give back when I have received so much," he said. "Having Parkinson's is hard, but I find the people in this program are the inspiration I need because their struggles are equally difficult and lifelong."



Let's Get Together

In the spirit of togetherness and community integration, OPWDD launched the Get Together awareness campaign to promote unity in the community. Inspired by the 1960s song of the same name, Get Together is about encouraging people to come together to achieve full community inclusion for everyone.

As people with developmental disabilities continue to integrate into community settings, it is increasingly important to educate and encourage acceptance and appreciation of what they bring to the community to ease the transition. By encouraging people to get together, get to know one another and grow together, we are building a future where similarities rather than differences are the focus.

To help spread the word about the campaign:

- Like OPWDD's Facebook page
- Like and share OPWDD's "Get Together" video featuring the band Flame on social media.
- Share our sample social media posts on your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts.
- Share photos of yourself "getting together" with people of all abilities out in the community. Don't forget to use the hashtags #GetTogether #PeoplePower and #NYSOPWDD.
- Request a People Power window sticker for your car, home or business by emailing communications.office@opwdd.ny.gov.

You can find all these resources and read more about the campaign by visiting opwdd.ny.gov/gettogether.



Parent Nick Congemi, who has a daughter who exhibits autism, agrees. "Boxing is a good outlet for people to express themselves. It helps people gain confidence and stay sharp," he said. "I have learned a lot here that I apply to my own family. I am teaching boxing to my daughter so she can express herself, and we have a good time doing this."

The training program culminates in the 1,000-punch challenge, where athletes demonstrate their skills and throw 100 punches each to their assigned coach (wearing protective gear, of course!) to collect pledge money that they donate to a chosen charity. For the past two years, they have raised nearly \$5,000 for the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. Athletes are recognized for their achievements, are awarded "Champs Keep Fighting" shirts, and wear the International Boxing Federation's gold championship belt, loaned to the program just for this occasion.

It's a fact – the athletes are undisputed champions for life! ■

For more information about this boxing program in the Capital Region, contact Tom Schreck at 518-577-5369 or email tschreck@wildwoodprograms.org. For programs in other parts of the state, check with local boxing gyms or ask your care managers for assistance.

EmployAbility and Put Everyone in New York to Work

EmployAbility Honor Roll Recognizes Businesses that have Taken the Pledge:



Promoting opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to have good jobs in their communities remains a goal for OPWDD in 2019.

With the unemployment rate in our nation at an all-time low, businesses may be finding it more difficult to hire

qualified employees. OPWDD, in conjunction

with the NYS Employment First Commission, launched the EmployAbility Pledge to encourage New York businesses to commit to embracing a philosophy of inclusivity and to join in creating communities that seek to include individuals of all abilities.

The EmployAbility Pledge was launched in October as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) at Crossgates Mall in Albany. More than 50 employers participated in an interactive discussion with John Robinson, Our Ability, Inc. CEO, and Mike Miller, Price Chopper/Market 32 VP/HR Operations about how employing people with disabilities benefits their bottom line. Staff at Apple provided a demonstration about how technology can help businesses hire the best employees.

To complement the EmployAbility Pledge, Price Chopper/Market 32 hosted an Employment Learning Lounge to help people with disabilities find, apply for and prepare for employment, while learning about businesses that are currently hiring. Price Chopper/Market 32 human resources professionals helped job seekers learn how to search for a job, prepare a résumé, participate in an interview, and more.

Businesses who sign the EmployAbility Pledge receive a window decal and a digital badge for their website designating their business as one that supports inclusion. They are also listed on the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities' and Employment First Commission's websites as inclusive businesses.

If you know a business who supports hiring people with disabilities, encourage them to sign the EmployAbility Pledge today, and ask other businesses to join them. To find the EmployAbility Pledge or get more information about how businesses can hire dependable, loyal, qualified and flexible employees, visit OPWDD's website at <https://opwdd.ny.gov/employability>. ■

Alaant Workforce Solutions
Aspire of WNY
Autism Services, Inc.
Autism Services, Inc.
Beautiful Memories
Gemach

Capital Region NP Consulting
Center for Career Freedom
Crystal Run Village, Inc.
Cutie Pharma-Care, Inc.
DNR Pet Grooming
EBizDocs
Epilepsy-Pralid, Inc.
eVero Corporation
Family Resource Network, Inc.
First Reformed Church of Schenectady
Golub Corp./Market 32/Price Chopper
Great Tie Consulting Corporation
Greystone Programs
Home Instead Senior Care
Jewish Federation of NENY
Label Shopper
Lifetime Assistance, Inc.
National Littauer Hospital
New Beginnings Thrift Shop
New Process Cleaners
New York Community Bank
Northeast Career Planning
Onondaga Community College
OPWDD
Our Ability, Inc.
Proficient Sports Training
Pyramid Management Group
Resource Center for Accessible Living, Inc.
Ring Around The Spectrum
Rosenblum Development Corporation
Schenectady JCC
Schoharie Arc
Scholet Furniture
Starbridge Services, Inc.
The Arc Lexington
The Arc of Rensselaer County
The Mildred Elley School
The Summit Center
Transitions
Universal Care Services, LLC
WellLife Network Inc.
Western NY Independent Living, Inc.

OPWDD Seeks To Improve Supports Through Managed Care



People with developmental disabilities and their families want services that truly meet their needs now and in the future. OPWDD, with the help of providers, families and the people we serve, has been taking steps to make that goal possible.

The first step was to create Care Coordination Organizations that help each person develop a Life Plan and coordinate all of their developmental disability, medical and behavioral health services. Care coordination was featured in the previous issue of this newsletter.

The next step is to transition the delivery of services to a managed care system designed specifically for people with developmental disabilities and delivered by providers with experience in supporting them. Managed care will coordinate and deliver all of a person's services, including OPWDD-funded services, health care, behavioral health and medication

management.

Currently, people with developmental disabilities receive services from voluntary agencies who are paid on a "fee-for-service" basis, or how many times the service is provided. Managed care is a payment system that pays managed care organizations to oversee a network or group of providers who deliver the needed services and ensure the person's health and personal goals are met. Managed care is meant to reward providers that help people achieve the outcomes or goals they desire, and also encourage them to identify new ways of providing services that really help people succeed.

Initially, people will enroll in managed care on a voluntary basis, meaning a person chooses whether they would like to be enrolled in managed care. To ensure a smooth transition, OPWDD will monitor the progress of managed care plans and make adjustments as needed before

enrollment becomes mandatory.

Last fall, OPWDD held a number of forums across New York State specifically to provide information to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. This spring, a policy document which outlines how services will be delivered in managed care will be released and OPWDD will be seeking public comment. In addition, there is important information posted on the OPWDD website, including a brochure and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that will help people understand and prepare for the change. People can direct questions to their regional office, call OPWDD's Information Line at 1-866-946-9733 or email peoplefirstwaiver@opwdd.ny.gov They can also sign up to receive important updates by using the Join the Conversation link on the homepage of OPWDD's website, www.opwdd.ny.gov.



Cops On Top Mops Up

Above: In August, Cops on Top held its annual 'sit-in' fundraising event at multiple Dunkin' Donuts locations throughout New York State to raise awareness and money for Special Olympics-New York.

L to R: Deputy Chrissy Peterson, Onondaga County Sheriff's Dept.; Cameron Rucker, Special Olympics volunteer; Josh Smyse, Special Olympics athlete; Deputy Kathy Vickers, Onondaga County Sheriff's Dept.

March Means One of A Kind

It is the unique abilities and contributions of all its members that makes a community whole. During the month of March, which is Developmental Disabilities Awareness

Month, OPWDD invites you to meet 31 people whose stories make them "One of A Kind." To read about their accomplishments and talents, visit [OPWDD's website](http://www.opwdd.ny.gov) and check out our March calendar which will feature a different person each day. Don't forget to also visit our [Facebook page](#) and tell us how you, too, are "One of A Kind" by sharing your picture and story. For more information, contact us at communications.office@opwdd.ny.gov



Butterfly on Wheels

“There is a beautiful butterfly inside us all.”

-Shameka Andrews

The above quote is the message conveyed in the children’s book *Butterfly on Wheels*, written by Albany resident Shameka Andrews.

And although the message seems clear enough, the meaning behind the book is what is so inspirational.

Shameka, who has Spina Bifida, wrote the creative story based on her own life, which she likened to the stages of a butterfly. As a baby, she was born from an egg, evolving to a larva we know as a caterpillar, beginning to look at the world around her and realizing she wasn’t like other children.

This caterpillar lived with her mom and three siblings in an apartment in Albany without accessible transportation. Shameka felt isolated, spending most of her time reading alone in her room, much like the chrysalis encasing the caterpillar.

At the age of 23, Shameka moved to her own apartment, and her metamorphosis was complete when this butterfly began getting involved in her community, gaining employment, and becoming a staunch disability advocate.

Last year when Shameka was preparing to get a new computer, she came across many journals she kept throughout the years. Writing journals was a way for Shameka to address her feelings and through that expression, she realized that in order for her to be happy, the most important person she needed to love her was herself. She thought about writing a children’s book so others could benefit.

Shameka attended a writing workshop led by a friend of hers who was a publisher, and was inspired to put pen to paper. A year later, *Butterfly on Wheels* became a reality. The heartfelt story of this little caterpillar is available for order online through Amazon. Shameka spends considerable time speaking at schools and community organizations where she tells her story. She is recording an audio version of her first book, and admits she wishes she had more time to market *Butterfly on Wheels*.



Next, she is planning on writing a series of books and revamping her video blog, *Wisdom on Wheels*.

When Shameka is not writing, she serves as coordinator of the Ms. Wheelchair NY Program, provides wellness workshops at the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley, is Community Outreach Coordinator for the Self Advocacy Association of New York and founder of Disability Empowered Consulting.

In *Butterfly on Wheels*, the caterpillar heard a voice: “We all have things about us that make us different. That’s what makes us special. You just have to believe and you will find your wings.” ■



Join the Conversation!

There are many new things on the horizon, and OPWDD wants the individuals and families we support to be the first to know!

Sharing news that is important to all our stakeholders quickly and directly is a top priority.

That’s why we’re inviting individuals and families to Join the Conversation by signing up for our online community. We will send you periodic emails about things you should know. And like any good conversation, we want to hear

from you, so please give us your input and feedback. All contact information will be kept confidential. Staff can also sign up to Join the Conversation.

To Join the Conversation visit <https://opwdd.ny.gov/jointheconversation> ■



OPWDD Wellness Initiative

In 2019, the Fit It In employee wellness initiative will expand its program offerings to include people receiving supports and services.

As noted in the new “Get Together” campaign, (see page 3) OPWDD is about encouraging people to get together in their communities to achieve full inclusion. The Fit It In wellness initiative will continue to embrace everyone’s unique contributions and abilities through the development and promotion of universal activities and events in 2019.

Embracing Full Inclusion

Armed with information provided by self-advocates at the SANYS conference about how they would like to fit wellness into their lives, the Fit It In team plans to develop quarterly activities that are universally inclusive and can be enjoyed by all. Examples of these include bingo with a wellness theme and dancing. These activities will be distributed and promoted during each quarter of 2019.

For more information about the Fit It In wellness initiative, please visit: <https://opwdd.ny.gov/fit-it-in> ■

NYS Launches I/DD ID Cards

Standardized identification (ID) cards for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are now available upon request in New York State. The goal of the I/DD ID cards is to help first responders such as law enforcement, firefighters and emergency medical services personnel better understand and interact with people with developmental disabilities who may not be able to communicate their situation effectively.

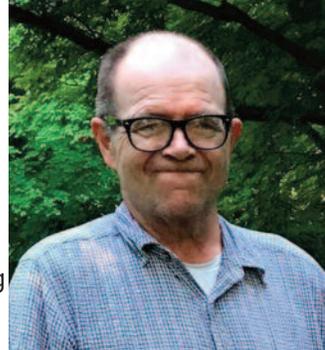
The legislation introducing the I/DD ID was sponsored by Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara (D), who was inspired by the need for a communication tool to be used with first responders by his own son who has autism. Governor Cuomo signed the legislation into law in 2018 and the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities was charged with making the cards available to New Yorkers. The I/DD ID cards are optional for people with developmental disabilities and available at no cost.

The front of the I/DD ID card displays the statement: “I have a developmental disability. I may have difficulty understanding and following your directions or may become unable to respond. I may become physically agitated if you prompt me verbally or touch me or move too close to me. A developmental disability is not an excuse for illegal behavior. I am not intentionally refusing to cooperate. I may need your assistance. Please see the back of this card.”

The back of the card includes the card bearer’s name, address, date of birth and emergency contact information. People with developmental disabilities or their loved ones can request a card by visiting <https://opwdd.ny.gov/iddidcards>. ■

Back on the Job

After working for 35 years, many people would be ready for a break, but not Mel Shenton. After retiring from his position as an assistant in a veterinarian’s office, Mel decided he wanted to go back to work. He says he has always enjoyed working and likes the friends he has made.



He entered back into the workforce as an intern at the Keon Center in Peekskill, a non-profit organization that provides free job and life skills training to people with developmental disabilities. Mel moved his way up the ladder at Keon to a part-time, supported employment position where he now works at a summer camp at one of the area schools. During camp season, Mel mops the floors and cleans bathrooms, but when camp is not in session Mel also works at a therapeutic equestrian center, a yoga center, and a pottery studio where he does similar types of jobs.

Mel enjoys working at his various jobs because he has made friends and it keeps him busy. He has been back working for about eight years and says that being employed has made him more independent. Mel takes a lot of pride in his work and being able to make his own money. When asked how long he thinks he will continue working, Mel said he would continue as long as he was physically able to do his job.

In addition to working hard at his job, Mel has also worked hard to get healthier. Mel used to be a very heavy smoker, but after a strong medical recommendation to cut down and support from the treatment team at his residence, he decided to make a change. It’s been a couple of years now and Mel is down to smoking just four cigarettes a day! The key to his success? Reducing the number of cigarettes he smoked by one or two every couple of months until he got down to four per day.

Mel is proud of all his hard work at his job and in cutting back on smoking.

Mel’s advice to anyone thinking about getting a job is “Go for it, if it’s something you like.” ■

A New Noah



Many people think about losing weight and getting healthier, but Noah is actually doing it!

Noah Krantz has lost 46 pounds in the past two-and-a-half years and is feeling great! He decided to make some lifestyle changes because he was concerned about getting diabetes. With the support of his family and his therapist, Noah met regularly with a dietician, started eating smaller portions and making big salads leading to his impressive weight loss.

Now that he has lost weight and is feeling healthier, Noah says his life is much happier. Through this journey, he has learned to cut his portions in half and is very proud of his hard work. Noah's advice to anyone else trying to get healthy is to "eat lots of vegetables." For more tips on how to get healthier visit https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/index.html.

Now that Noah is healthier and feeling better his primary focus is on his new jobs. Noah recently got not one, but two part-time jobs. He works at ACME Market helping with carts and organizing shelves and at OPWDD's clinic in Tarrytown at the reception desk.

Noah says Ability Beyond and the Arc helped him with his employment search and that even though it was hard work finding employment, it was worth it. Noah says he enjoys working because it is nice to get two paychecks and be able to save up for the things that he wants.

In his free time, Noah likes to go out with his family, go to the mall, and enjoys gardening with his friends. Someday, Noah hopes to live on his own and will continue to work on this goal. Noah has made a lot of progress in two-and-a-half years and as he will tell you, "I'm doing great!" ■

Acting Commissioner Ted Kastner

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In 2015 he returned to Einstein, now part of Montefiore Medical Center, where he directed the Rose F. Kennedy Children's Evaluation and Rehabilitation Center. He also held the Ruth L. Gottesman Chair in Developmental Medicine and dual appointments in both Pediatrics and Psychiatry/Behavioral Health.

What has been some of his experiences in managed care?

Ted has worked in 25 states providing consultation, direct services and nearly every other aspect of health care. He operated and closed a large public Intermediate Care Facility in Arkansas and also closed an inpatient unit for children at the Arkansas State Hospital, moving all of the children into individualized community settings using state plan and waiver services.

When did Dr. Kastner first become interested in the field of developmental disabilities?

Ted had experience in the field early in his career, as 40 years ago he worked six days a week as a live-in aide at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind Sunlight House in Scituate. He also is a family member of a person with developmental disabilities.

What is Dr. Kastner's vision for OPWDD?

"I am committed to helping improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families and to holding our staff and provider agencies accountable to the same standards that I have tried to meet during my career," said Dr. Kastner.

"As we move ahead toward a more responsive and flexible service system, I look forward to working together with the people that we support, their family members, and providers. Your insight will help to bring about change" he said, "...not just for the sake of change...but to deliver better access and better lives to people with developmental disabilities."

Our readers will be hearing more from Acting Commissioner Kastner in future editions. You also can receive regular updates from him via email. To Join the Conversation, visit OPWDD's website at www.opwdd.ny.gov and complete the online form to sign up. ■

Attention Providers: Resources Available to Recruit + Retain Workforce

OPWDD is collaborating with agencies in the human service sector, labor and educational systems to develop strategies and best practices that support a stable workforce for the developmental disabilities system. One of those partnerships is with the NYS Department of Labor (DOL), offering no-cost programs and services through its statewide Business Engagement program. Find out how these free DOL resources can help your workforce on the OPWDD website https://opwdd.ny.gov/providers_staff/recruitment_and_retention