



Center for Disability Services



Center Connections

Winter 2021



Message From Maria Kansas Devine Chief Medical Officer

Dear Families of the Center,

COVID-19 has brought many challenges to the individuals and staff of the Center for Disability services. I am proud of all of our staff who have embraced the protocols that

the COVID team has developed over the past year. I would like to take this space to review our accomplishments, our challenges and my anticipation of the future.

Since March of 2020, when COVID-19 was identified as a true threat to the health of our nation, our staff and nurses have been navigating the ever changing vista of recommendations and regulations from NYS department of health, the CDC and OPWDD. Our COVID task force which included myself, residential nursing, management and leadership have worked together to craft and implement protocols designed to optimize safety for our individuals and our staff. They have been practicing caution using our carefully developed protocols for PPE, visitation and quarantine. Using these protocols, we have been able in most cases to monitor and safely keep your loved ones at home. We partnered with Center Health Care and were able to continue the majority of Physical, Occupational, Speech and Social work services by leveraging our telehealth capabilities. Medical Providers at Center Health Care continued to provide both telehealth and in-person visits throughout the pandemic restrictions avoiding many lapses in care that might have occurred otherwise. Our dental department re-opened well before most other locations using enhanced PPE and sanitation protocols.

What will the future bring? No crystal ball available here but I can say the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine is a game changer. As a medical provider, I am confident that this is a critical factor in returning our lives to safety. Center Health Care has been accepted as an approved Moderna vaccine provider. We have partnered with Albany Medical Center, the regional COVID vaccine HUB, to secure vaccinations for our residents and staff, which were administered at our residences and at Center Health Care. While our supply is currently limited, we have prioritized vaccinating all well individuals in residence who have completed consents. I heartily invite all who have not yet taken advantage of this opportunity to do so as soon as possible.

Wishing all a Happy, Healthy and Uneventful New Year!
Maria Kansas Devine MD, FAAFP, CPE
Chief Medical Officer



Message from the CEO Greg Sorrentino

As we kick off the first newsletter of 2021, much of what you will see is how the Center has managed the pandemic. We are proud of our staff for their incredible resilience, flexibility, and commitment to our mission, they have been true heroes in every sense of the word. As you will see throughout this newsletter, the Center has re-opened day programs at limited sites, and school has resumed in-person learning at all locations, and is also offering remote learning to those who choose not to be live. Our health clinic too, is providing on site medical care and is offering Telehealth for those who prefer. I am proud of how the Center has adapted to this pandemic, always keeping those we support and their families at the forefront of our service delivery model. I would also like to draw attention to the newly constructed Respite House in Queensbury. Respite care is a tremendous need in the North Country, we are proud to be able to step up and meet that need, to complement our other services in that region under our Prospect Center affiliate. Happy New Year to everyone, I hope you all stay healthy and safe.



Our HAIR-O

Hair, hair everywhere! With this pandemic, came hair—lots of hair. With the help of social media, I am sure we all saw the results of the salons being closed. By the time they opened again, many were in desperate need of a haircut! Some even had fun with the situation, as seen in many viral videos of (often failed) attempts of the at-home salon/barbershop experience. Well, here at St. Margaret's Center, we too had to close our salon for a bit; and we too were in desperate need of haircuts after some time. Thankfully, we had a HAIR-O in our midst! She swooped in with her super hair-cutting powers and saved the day!

We opened our salon doors again, and with the help of our staff member, Jennifer Minshell (our HAIR-O) we gave many residents a fresh new look. On the upside, with the extra length of hair, some residents were inspired to try out some new styles! We even had fun with before and after pictures!

2020 Buddy Walk a Virtual Success!!

The 2020 Capital Region Buddy Walk went virtual this year. The highlights included a Car Parade on October 17, 2020 and small group walks with family and friends. Usually, hundreds come out for the walk in support of those with Down syndrome, but this year, even though it was celebrated differently, the mission was still the same!



After participating in the car parade the teams enjoyed the beautiful autumn afternoon!



As part of the 2020 Capital Region Buddy Walk, long time friend of the Center, Assembly Member John McDonald joined a group of walkers in Cohoes to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of people with Down Syndrome .

The Queensbury Free Standing Respite

The Center for Disability Services is very excited to announce the addition of a Free Standing Respite in Queensbury to our family of services! This facility will provide much needed respite services to families and caregivers in and around the North Country.



This new facility will allow us to provide respite services to 15 people in the day to early evening hours and 8 people overnight. This service will be available to people 6 years old and up living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Families needing care for their loved ones will be able to utilize this respite with the assurance that their family member is being cared for by professionally trained staff. Staff are skilled in a wide array of areas in order to provide quality services.



The respite will be available to families during school vacations allowing children to enjoy their vacation time with friends. Equally important respite is available to allow caregivers the much needed time for themselves.

This newly built facility has 8 single bedrooms allowing for privacy and a play area off of the main living space, in addition to the typical living spaces. Thank you so much to all who have contributed to making this dream a reality!

Education During a Pandemic

As with everything during these trying times the Education staff at the Center has been working diligently to make sure that all of the students don't skip a beat in their school experience!

In the fall the Prospect School was excited to start the new year with options for in person and virtual learning. To prepare for our return, Bridget Lieberum, Physical Therapist, formed a group who developed two videos to assist students in learning about the changes at school. These videos were shared on our Google classrooms to be viewed by students and their families. Return to school looked a little different, but we continue to have fun while learning!



Lanagn School staff worked extra hard to create a Haunted House for the students and staff to enjoy as they have for many years. The Physical Education staff and Langan staff who helped set it up successfully achieved this goal while adhering to Center and Department of Health guidelines relating to



COVID and Haunted Houses. The staff and students who went through the Haunted House definitely enjoyed themselves. Gillian, an Occupational Therapy Assistant, did an amazing job of bringing this



experience virtually to a student who was participating in virtual instruction. It was great that even though the student was at home for school he did not have to miss out on the fun!



A special shout out to SEFCU, Northwestern Mutual, and Eleanor's School of Dance for their generous donations. Because of these donations 65 students from Langan School, CloverPatch Preschool, and Langan School at Prospect Center received approximately 150

holiday gifts. This was particularly challenging as packages were delivered to the school at a time when all students were participating in distance learning. The staff in Children's Services worked diligently to get gifts delivered to the families while balancing social distance protocols with holiday cheer.

To cap off the holiday season Room 10 made a holiday scene in their Google Meet class. The students did a great job making choices to put in the scene. They decided that this scene depicts December 26th and Santa is resting after delivering all the presents!



Everyone in the Education Division is looking forward to 2021 and are ready to face whatever it brings!

Joslin Award

This year the recipient of the Joslin Award was Gladys Jones. Gladys has been a devoted and dependable employee of the Center's Commercial Services for 14 years. She positively contributes to the success of Commercial Services through her hard work and willingness to assist in a multitude of ways.

The Joslin Outstanding Performers Award is given to workplace heroes who step up to deliver a job well done, take pride in their performance and go above and beyond in their work. Year after year Gladys demonstrates those traits. As Director of Operations, Chris Schelin stated, "Gladys' pleasant demeanor makes her a joy to be around at the shop. Her co-workers respect her efforts and her willingness to take on any responsibility in order to help the business.

Congratulations Gladys, well deserved!



Dental Unit Make Over

In early 2020, the Dental Dept. at Center Health Care received a grant from the Hearst Foundation. We began a renovation to update many aspects of the unit.

New dental chairs were purchased and upgrades for the x-ray equipment were implemented. Each dental exam room received an update with new cabinetry, flooring and fresh paint.

What was not anticipated was the effect of the pandemic. Things were put on hold with the research of proper protocols including PPE (personal protective equipment) and establishing new dental protocols for the safety and well-being of our patients and staff.

The good news is that we were able to reopen our unit in late July with those protocols in place and the renovation completed. Staff were able to return to work to provide the dental care our patients need to maintain good dental health.

Our New Look!



Day Program Reopening!

In July, when OPWDD gave day programs the green light to reopen, the Center's Day Program staff could not have been more excited! After being closed for four long months, staff were thrilled to have some people return to some of the sites while others continued to provide day hab activities in the residences. One of the main priorities of the Center and the staff was to make sure that the reopening was done safely. This meant lots of training on PPE, safety precautions, and cleaning and disinfecting procedures. There was also coordination with Center Transportation and Article 16 Clinical Services. Since all of the day program sites were not opening, some people were transferred to a different day site that was closer to their home. Although this meant a change for some, everyone approached it as an opportunity to meet new people and create new relationships. Understanding that safety is important for everyone in these times, the staff supported and assisted the individuals to do whatever they can to be safe. Everyone spent time learning about the importance of hand hygiene, wearing a mask and social distancing.

Even though these are crazy times, the staff at the day programs have worked hard to try to make day program as normal as possible. They have used their creativity come up with activities that people enjoyed but also keep them safe.



Virtual activities is one of the creative ways that staff use to help keep everyone connected. Whether it is a Current Events Group, Chair Yoga, Trivia Games, Bingo, or Ned's Warrior on Wheels, virtual activities provide everyone, whether they are at Day Hab or at home, an opportunity to connect and socialize with their friends.

Many of the individuals took advantage of the beautiful weather we had in the summer and fall by spending time outdoors for walks and activities. Our Without Walls Program explored all over the capital region with hikes, visits to area parks, and pumpkin and apple picking. Now with winter here, the program enjoys bowling,

presents many virtual activities, including a cooking show, for individuals at home and gives back to their community through volunteering for Meals on Wheels. Even though some things about day hab have changed, some things are exactly the same. We've made new friends, learned some new things and although we might be wearing a mask and be a little farther away from each other, we're enjoying being back together in day hab and hoping that everyone will be back



Special Musical Guests



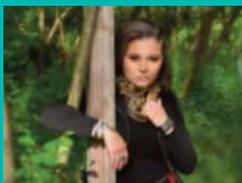
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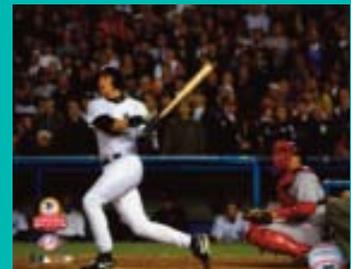
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Special guests to appear during the broadcast!

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New York Yankees



Dion Lewis, Running Back
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Residential Division

Creativity Providing Enrichment and Fulfillment

Delivery of Mail and PPE

As with everything in the age of Covid the every day tasks of getting mail and other necessary items to all of our facilities has changed.

Staff from People's Services, Human Resources and Administration have joined with the Residential Divisions's Operations staff to deliver the mail and supply all of the homes with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

This dedicated group work at all hours of the day to ensure that the individuals who receive services and the staff have what they need to be safe.



Recently one of the individuals who lives at the Montana residence and his staff have joined the "mail team". They have taken on the Schenectady run twice a week!



We would like to thank everyone for their efforts and teamwork in getting this vital operational work done.

In addition to Ben and his staff from Montana we would like to thank Sue Foley, Sue Williams, Linda Durocher and Ron Zinoman for all they have done to assist with these tasks!



The quality of life for the individuals who receive services from us has been greatly affected during this pandemic and the staff have relied on their creativity to overcome the challenge. Overcome they did and with great success!!

The Dudley Ave. residence found a drive up zoo and were able to feed camels through the van window, gaze up at giant giraffes and relax taking in the beauty of the zebras!



Many of the residences took advantage of the nice fall weather for apple picking, picking out pumpkins, and walks in nature.



Arts and crafts projects were a great way to pass the time and explore everyone's creative side.



The ladies at Van Evera felt the way to enjoy their time at home and show their culinary skill was through baking cookies. I hope they made enough for everyone!!



With the onset of winter and the holiday season everyone was busy with decorating, zoom calls with families, and in home celebrations. For example the crew at Woodside Drive had a "December to Remember!" From Gingerbread houses to holiday movies, decorating cookies and sharing hot cocoa, good times were in full swing! Pajama's were mandatory for a "sleigh full of fun" for all to enjoy!

