



## People First

April 2015

### News and Information from the NYS OPWDD Developmental Disabilities State Operations Office – 1

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#### **DIRECTOR'S CORNER**



**Mike Feeney**

With full apologies to our hardy, cold weather-loving staff and service recipients, enough already with winter! The National Weather Service has officially confirmed that February 2015 was the coldest month on record in Upstate NY. In fact, daily NWS weather reporting showed the temperature only rose above freezing a whopping 5 hours for the entire month! We set the record for total ice coverage on Lakes Erie and Ontario. We made the national news for a 50-foot tall frozen geyser at Letchworth State Park. Ski slopes closed because the wind chills were too low. At Whiteface Mountain in the Adirondacks the wind chill at the summit was recorded as -110. Again, enough already!

Thankfully, we've change the clocks (spring ahead), our evenings will be a bit brighter, temperature will moderate and we can finally shed our second and third layers of sweaters. Admittedly, pot-hole season could set more records as gaping roadway canyons swallow whole cars, vans, and trucks. No matter, our spirits will soar as spring finally arrives and we can safely venture outside.

Spring is a time of renewal and growth. With that perspective, I'm happy to report recent gains in our hiring efforts. In both the West Seneca and Rochester offices we are processing more employment applications and hires. The March NEO classes were full and we still have many applicants progressing through EHS assessments and background checks. The collective efforts of our HR and State Operations Managers is starting to pay off. In Rochester 35 new staff were hired in February and March. In West Seneca 40 new hires joined our agency. Altogether, 75 new staff members began their career with us in the past 30+ days. In April the Rochester Office will conduct three NEO sessions and the 4/2 class is already full. In West Seneca we are just starting to rebound from delays in January and February EHS appointments. While April's NEO classes will be smaller in the Buffalo area, we have gained access to dozens of additional EHS appointments and are scheduling possible new hires as fast as we can. This is, indeed, very good news!

Along with those gains we have also made progress in expediting the approval to fill positions. The RTF (Request to Fill) process has now been decentralized back to our offices. For a number of years all hiring for any position had to be approved by our Central Office budget office and, depending on the title, NY State's Division of the Budget (DOB.) In the end, all that accomplished was a slowing of hiring. With the re-established local authority to approve fills we can expedite hiring decisions and better manage against our authorized fills. Region 1 has long demonstrated a tremendous capacity to make the most of every position allocated to our programs. Frankly, the restoration of local control over the hiring process was only possible because we've been able to demonstrate and argue our strength in managing resources. In fact, we're one of the few regions authorized to approve hiring locally. That's a true measure of our status and commitment to keeping Hiring as Job #1.

Acknowledging that we may have turned an important corner as our seasons change – but not wanting to jinx our progress too – I'll merely express my deepest appreciation to everyone for their sincere and hardy

commitment to supporting those in our care during one of the roughest winters we've seen in quite some time. Your efforts to come to work in conditions that even tested the great spirit of the US Postal Service (neither rain, nor snow, or gloom of night . . .) have been truly inspirational. I'll also share our collective hope that the latest sunshine and longer days continue to sustain our spirits in the coming months. Happy Spring!

## **Celebrating Success**

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Jerry is a bright, outgoing 45 year old man who makes a difference in the world. After graduating from East High School, Jerry began attending CP Rochester's Day Habilitation Program and receiving occupational and physical therapy, recreation, and respite services. Jerry works in an area service provider's scanning department and participates in their Incident Review Committee and Universal Enhancement Trainings.

Jerry is very happy with his experience at CP Rochester's Day Habilitation Program. He socializes with friends, attends recreational outings, plays games, and participates in cooking groups. Through our partner agency, SportsNet, Jerry is an active and vocal member of the Rochester Speed Demon Power Wheelchair Soccer Team. He and his teammates attend two practices each month and compete against teams from Buffalo and Syracuse.

Jerry works hard to advocate for increased funding and other changes which will enhance the lives of people with disabilities. He looks forward to a future where society will stop using words that hurt and see people for their abilities.



## JAMO "The Famous Mind"

"I don't ever get bored because I use my talent."

A resident of Brooklawn Rd. group home in Rochester has determined herself to be a woman for whom life is a canvas. JAMO, (a nick-name she prefers when speaking of herself as an artist), fills her schedule with creative art experiences of all kinds—music, painting, drawing, poetry-writing—each one is an effort to use her "Famous Mind". It is within her mind where JAMO feels the strongest. She feels her best. She feels her force. She finds the most inspiration, and that, according to JAMO, is the sense of giftedness which drives her.

"I like to stay focused and I like to get creative," JAMO says. "I feel blessed to have that."

Although her images show a strong imagination, JAMO maintains a constant interest in reality. "My life inspires me. My reality. I look carefully and I remember what I see," she says. Next is where her mind comes in. Her art shows "things coming out," otherwise known as expression, which is just as much a reality to her as the people, places, and things going into it. Instead of tuning out, JAMO holds her unique way of expression in high esteem, as an important way to be a part of things.

"I'm very careful about what I do. I work hard. I ask a lot of questions, it's important to me."

JAMO participates in the arts-centered Spectrum day program, attends New Directions, and Studio 16 at MDC, not to mention the books and books of drawings she does at home in her spare time. She is happy to work on her own or as a way of connecting with others (most staff she encounters will be invited to have their portrait done by her.) Still, JAMO is always looking to grow and be challenged. She says she



struggles with expressing her feelings and cares about being better, more thoughtful. Again, it all comes back to the value she gives her mind; her instrument for celebrating her individuality. "I do want to be a famous, rich artist," she says honestly. However, in the meantime, JAMO knows that what she does to stay active in art is how she herself holds onto her own worth on a daily basis.

"I've been doing art since I was four years old. Over time, I've gotten much better drawing and painting people and working on a street-art style. I think people might admire my paintings, but I don't know how to read other people's minds. The reason I do it is for myself, not for other people."

What does the future hold for JAMO as an artist? "I want to paint myself. I've only drawn myself in pencil. I want to paint myself with watercolors." She continues to work on a series of pieces which explore different emotions as imagined in the Statue of Liberty. She is working on giving titles to her pieces. She also plans to submit a piece to a community art display this spring. Beyond that, who knows? One thing is for sure: JAMO's Famous Mind will be with her every step of the way.





*JAMO working on a large watercolor in studio.*

## **Volunteers in Progress at Pathways, Inc.**

**By Dee Righter, Director of Community Based Services**

Volunteer connections within the community have long been a part of the type of support offered to individuals within the Pathways, Inc. programs. In fact, it became such a vital part of what the individual's wanted to do that coordination of our volunteer connections became necessary. As a result, a directory of volunteer connections and oversight was established in 1994. In response to this fast growing desire by the individuals within the Developmental Disabilities (DD) programs, the name "Volunteers in Progress" (VIP's) was quickly established.

A Coordinator of Community Volunteer Connections was named and, as the coordination grew over the years, it became a team effort providing support to participants within not only the DD programs, but also the Traumatic Brain Injury and Nursing Home Transition and Diversion programs, as well.

The volunteer connections are the beginnings of real inclusion for most of the individuals we support; relationships are formed and commitments made. Community non-profit businesses allow the volunteers to use their site as a teaching environment and these businesses look forward to and depend on the volunteers for the assignments they fulfill. Staff and volunteer expectations are outlined for each community connection. Currently Pathways, Inc. supports 163 volunteers at 35 community sites in Chemung, Steuben and Schuyler counties. Volunteer sites vary and include nature centers, animal

shelters, town halls, churches, libraries, Meals On Wheels, care centers, food pantries, thrift shops and museums, to name a few.

A VIP recognition and awards dinner is held in the spring of each year to honor the volunteers and the community sites that support them. Attendance at this event always averages around 300 guests, including volunteers, community site representatives, staff and family. This gala event includes a sit-down dinner, live music, dancing and awards.

The event is all about volunteering – volunteers honoring volunteers. Several community organizations have supported this event since it's early inception, including: Chemung County Sunrise Rotary Club; American Legion-Skinner Ernest Memorial Post 1612; Light's Bakery; Chemung County Meals on Wheels; Peter Haskell – One Man Band; and the Three River City Jazz Band. This well-established landmark event at Pathways, Inc. has continued due to the ongoing support of these faithful organizations.

Each year a theme is identified that promotes service, achievement, and/or celebration. Previous themes have included: Helping Hands, Stars of the Night, Mardi Gras, Olympics and Celebrating Service. This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of this most cherished event with A Walk Down Memory Lane!



## **My Super Life With Autism**

*(This is a re-posting of an article written by Cynthia Markowicz which is currently published in the central office PeopleFirst Newsletter, Spring 2015 edition.)*

Many of us have been inspired by superheroes while growing up. Jeremiah Iheoma of Farmington took this concept to a new level, portraying himself as a superhero to help others understand that living with autism can be a good thing. He said, "It helps you become a good person and it helps you to be good with your brain."

"My Super Life With Autism" is a children's book written, illustrated, and self-published by the fifth grader who attends Canandaigua Primary Elementary School. In his introduction, Jeremiah writes, "Hi, my name is Jeremiah and I have Asperger's which is a form of autism. This book is to help you understand some of the 'superpowers' I have, as well as some of the struggles I face in dealing with autism..."

"One of the 'superpowers' I have is that I have a very good memory...Another thing I am really good at is music, rhythm and dance...Like with everyone else, I have strengths and weaknesses. One thing I struggle with is when I get wound up it is hard for me to calm down by myself...I am a very smart boy with a pretty high IQ. It (Asperger's) just means my mind works differently than others..."

Jeremiah, who was inspired by two young friends who also wrote books, felt his book could be used to show that autism is a gift. Jeremiah decided to use Claymation to illustrate his book, with the central figure being a superhero with a cape and a smile who faces challenges and overcomes obstacles. He



said that the most difficult part of writing the book was “choosing the right kind of art” for the illustrations. Once that difficult decision was made, however, he said that creating the illustrations was the easiest part. His mother, Lisa Peck, a Recreational Therapist at DDSO 1 in the Finger Lakes, said it took Jeremiah about one year to complete the project.

In recognition of his accomplishment, The Wood Library held a book signing in February. Jeremiah was featured on 13 WHAM/Fox Good Morning, a Rochester morning news program. Jeremiah has a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/iheomabooks>) and a website ([www.iheomabooks.com](http://www.iheomabooks.com)) where the book can be purchased for \$10 plus tax and shipping. Jeremiah plans to use the proceeds of his book to help pay for his college education.

Jeremiah has enjoyed writing and said this process has really helped him realize that writing is another important part of him. One page in the book features how famous people who have autism have changed the world. Jeremiah feels that he, too, can change the world through his writing. He plans to continue writing and is considering writing about sports next.



*Jeremiah and his mom at his book signing in Canandaigua*

## **Fishing Stories**

As the spring season approaches, we can't help but think about summer vacation opportunities. Here, we would like to share one group's experience from last year.

In Cattaraugus county, just north of Allegheny National Forest, is Allegheny State Park. 65,000 acres of woods and water encompass the park nicknamed “the wilderness playground of Western New York.” In 2007 Allegheny State Park was named as a top “amazing spot” in the nation.

From June 3<sup>rd</sup> to June 7<sup>th</sup> individuals and staff from the Center Street and King Street group homes were fortunate enough to spend some time in this spectacular wilderness. From the Center Street home, Tracy Radley and Suzann Galbreath took part in the camping experience with DA2 Tammy Griffin. Representing King Street were Antoinette (Toni) Pica and Wilma Becker. They were assisted by DA2 Don Buchinger and DA1 Michael Lyons. In the cabin just down the lane were friends from High Street and East High in Lockport.

With three lakes, numerous connecting waterways, trout streams, plus access to the Kinzua Reservoir, Allegheny State Park offers fishing opportunities for various species and skill levels. After getting only a couple bites at Science Lake the campers tried some of the areas inside the park. Numerous opportunities are available throughout the park and Toni and Tracy were both able to catch numerous pan fish on a couple different fishing excursions. Suzann tried fishing for a bit before tossing the pole to the ground and having a good laugh at doing so.

One of the unique features of Allegheny State Park is Thunder Rocks. Deposited by a glacier in the last ice age these outcroppings are visually stunning, offering fantastic photo opportunities. Toni, with the help of her friends Don and Tammy, was able to hike some of the trail and came back with some incredible pictures.

Throughout the trip the group also took part in some camping standards. S'mores were continually a fan favorite. Tracy, Suzann, Wilma, and Toni all had opportunities to enjoy the all-American treat. Most of the time making s'mores was spent with friends from High Street and East High in the adjoining cabin. The ladies all thoroughly enjoyed themselves and made fast friends. Tracy did not exhibit compulsive behaviors the entire trip and was gregarious to her cabin mates. In the evening Tracy shared her portable DVD player with the group, providing a nightly movie as the campers wound down from the busy days. Other opportunities the group were able to take advantage of were a visit to the park museum and a chance to do some shopping.

In all, the trip was a huge success. Tammy Griffin, the quarterback of the operation says there will be camping next year, though the location may change to "the Grand Canyon of the Northeast," Letchworth State Park. Seems the abundance of wildlife (i.e. bears) might be a little much for Tammy! Wherever the camping takes place the guarantees are that there will be plenty of food, fun, and friends.







### **Holiday Look-Back: Operation Christmas Child at Canandaigua Day Hab**

Last December, the folks at Canandaigua Day Hab participated in Operation Christmas Child. We shopped for and packed 16 shoeboxes with toys, puzzles, school supplies, and basic hygiene supplies for boys and girls ages 2-14. The boxes were shipped by Samaritan's Purse to children all over the world who, due to poverty or other life circumstances, may not have gotten any other presents over the holiday. For many of these children, they may be the first present they have ever gotten for any occasion in their lives. We had a lot of fun packing these gifts all together in a big group and some of the folks from Room 4 volunteered to drop them off at Victory Church in Henrietta so our boxes could be sent on their journey overseas.

The following is the letter we included in each box to tell a little about us and where we live:

*Merry Christmas from New York!*

*I hope you enjoy all the fun things we packed for you in this box. My friends and I at Canandaigua Day Hab had a lot of fun filling this box. We are a day program for adults located in Canandaigua, New York.*

*Canandaigua is in Western New York in the Finger Lakes region. The Finger Lakes are long skinny lakes that are very deep. We have a lot of corn, cabbage, onions, beans, squash, pumpkins, apples and we produce a lot of maple syrup. Usually at Christmas time it is cold here and we have a bunch of snow on the ground. We'll have snow all the way until late March when it starts to warm up again. This time of year in our area, people like to go skiing or snowboarding, go sledding, build snowmen, and go snowmobiling.*

*Here at Canandaigua Day Hab we like to do all sorts of things. We like to bake and cook, make all sorts of different crafts, watch movies, dance and sing, and play games like BINGO and volleyball. Filling shoeboxes was a group activity that we did this year and everyone enjoyed it very much.*

*We hope you enjoy your gifts and have a wonderful Christmas this years.*

*Sincerely,*

*Your friends at:*

*Canandaigua Day Hab  
3220 Middle Cheshire Rd.  
Canandaigua, NY 14424*

-Submitted by Lisa Peck, RT Parkside

\*\*\*A word about the author: **Lisa Peck** has a passion for finding creative ways to help others work through challenges in order to blossom. Be sure to check out the story of **her son Jeremiah's** venture into writing with the publication of **"My Super Life with Autism"**. Lisa stood up for him every step of the way on his journey towards diagnosis, support, acceptance, empowerment, and now author and businessman. "It was a rough road," she says, reflecting on all the ways she needed to advocate for her son along the way. Lisa acknowledges the connection she feels between her experiences with those we serve within OPWDD and her approach with Jeremiah. "I love what I do, therefore I am very passionate about it..."



*All of our boxes ready to travel.*



*Some of the items packed in a box for a little boy.*



*From our drop off location, boxes were sent to a regional distribution center, checked over, packed up, and sent out around the world.*

## **A Sense of Community through Volunteering**

**By George G. Weiss, Day Habilitation Program Manager, Pathways, Inc.**



The concept of "community" means so many things to different people. To some, it's belonging to an area club with others that share a common interest. It can mean going to a local restaurant regularly and forming relationships with the other patrons and workers. Some get a sense of community by going to a locally sponsored trivia or bingo game each week and becoming a regular. It can even be the simple act of donating one's time to help an area organization reach its fullest potential. When Pathways Inc.'s Day Services program began reaching out to help our individuals gain a better sense of community, the original intent was to enrich the lives of those who may otherwise not get the opportunity to engage in their community. For one volunteer opportunity in particular, our individuals ended up enriching the lives they touched through their own volunteering endeavors.

We learned about the chance to work with the North Chemung United Methodist Church in Lowman, NY from one of our supervisors. In the late summer of 2014, two of our sites began sending individuals and

staff to the church on a weekly basis to help with some general cleaning. Our individuals clean the gathering area in the basement and assist by cleaning the tables after church functions, sweeping and mopping the floors and setting up for weekend events at the church. Shortly afterwards, a partnership was formed between Pathways and the cemetery across the street from the church, to do some yard work for them. In the warmer weather, our individuals enjoyed raking and bagging leaves and cleaning up the cemetery grounds. This gave our individuals with an interest in gardening and yard maintenance the ability to do tasks they felt were meaningful and worthwhile while helping to beautify the space.

The assistance our individuals have provided to the church and cemetery have been so well-received, that the North Chemung United Methodist Church did an article on their hard work in their Winter 2014 Newsletter that goes out to all of their parishioners. In his Trustees Report, church member Darryl Gunderman states that, "...this program has FAR exceeded my expectations!" The church was so happy with the work our individuals have done that they showed their appreciation by throwing a Christmas party for our individuals with lots of pizza, ice cream, caroling and dancing. Our individuals also presented with church with a homemade wreath for them to decorate with. Darryl went on to say in his report, "Talk about genuine appreciation and gratitude. I said it once and I'll say it again, if you could not see Jesus out there smiling, laughing and dancing right along with them, then you really need to get your eyes checked!"

### **Showing Support for a Local Ambulance Crew**

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Every year the folks at Little Valley Day Habilitation get together to complete a fundraiser to benefit the local community. Last year the day hab raised money for the local library. This year it was decided that the local ambulance squad should be the recipient. The ambulance crew have been wonderful to all of us at the day hab. They respond to our emergencies and we wanted to show our appreciation.

The community inclusion opportunity was tremendous. This year's target/theme was Valentine's Day. Each room at the day hab pitched in some way to help. Some rooms shopped for supplies, some baked, and some decorated. Signs were made and hung around the town with the folks' assistance. Permission was sought and received to sell the goods at the local bank.

These beautiful and unique cupcakes were a hit. We are happy to announce that we sold out of all the goodies baked. We presented a check for \$515.50 to the ambulance squad. Kudos to all the staff and individuals involved in this wonderful and worthy endeavor.







### **Artistic Experiences at Pathways, Inc.**

**By Stephanie Schwartz, Program Director, Corning Day Habilitation Program**



Pathways, Inc. and 171 Cedar Arts Center in Corning, NY have partnered to provide instruction in the arts to individuals who receive our habilitation services. Through the years, efforts have been made to provide a wide variety of artistic mediums to increase the experiences these individuals get to enjoy. Some of those creative experiences include jewelry making, polymer clay class, painting, Zumba, creative music and movement, printmaking, seasonal arts and crafts, and ceramics.

Another class we take part in that is consistently a big hit is the theater class. In this class, the participants develop the storyline, identify or create the props that will be used to tell the story, rehearse their parts, and finally, they perform their original show. The growth that individuals achieve in just several weeks of preparing for their performance is amazing: people who are shy learn to project their voice to the audience; those that have difficulty speaking so others understand them, learn to enunciate their words; and they learn that the best ideas are the silliest ones during brainstorming, but somehow all the ideas are woven into the storyline. The pride and satisfaction is demonstrated in the beaming smiles on the faces of the actors and actresses after they perform for family and friends.

The fall 2014 performance was titled *Dragon Noodles*. The performance tells the story of a King and Queen who need to protect their two Princesses from the hungry dragon. They do this with the help of their knights. Their chef, Sir Noodles, often makes his signature dinner item, spaghetti. They have spaghetti so often that everyone is tired of it and they say in unison, "Not spaghetti again" whenever it is served. They ponder the dilemma of how to save everyone from the hungry dragon. Then, the solution strikes them... they feed the spaghetti to the dragon. The dragon's appetite is curbed and everyone is saved. The seemingly unrelated components somehow come together in a comical story; the imagination and creativity shown in the production is inspiring. The participants are movie stars and are able to watch

their recorded performance.

The beauty of artistic expression is that there aren't any rules that we need to live by and the artists have the opportunity to express their differences in an acceptable way. The norms of society are forgotten and there is no pressure to achieve the standards set by others. Through art, the most bizarre and outlandish ideas end up being the best pieces of art. Most importantly, learning occurs in a very natural way and doesn't even feel like learning. At Pathways, Inc., we promote artistic expression for the individuals we work with and we thank 171 Cedar Arts Center for partnering with us to achieve this goal.

### **People Inc. Guys Group Brightens Aaron Hanson's Life**

High-fives and hanging out with friends are all common occurrences for Aaron Hanson. This is all thanks to the Guys Group, a People Inc. program in which Aaron proudly participates. "It's awesome," Aaron said when asked about the group.

Developed by People Inc.'s Life Quality Coaching Department, the Guys Group helps young men with developmental disabilities who are between the ages of 18 and 30, discover and nurture their passions in life while building lasting friendships. The group provides social opportunities that include recreational, physical and volunteer activities. From sporting events and museums to eating out, there are countless opportunities for forming friendships with peers.

"It's good to have a friend," Aaron said, "We play basketball, play board games and just hang out." In addition to these activities, Aaron is looking forward to the group's upcoming cross county road trip. Scheduled to begin in the spring, the trip will be a video documented journey, entitled Crossing Borders, which will include Aaron and three others from the Guys Group.

"I never knew Aaron had so many friends until he joined the Guys Group," said Aaron's father, Mike. "You would swear he is the most popular guy and the social interaction has had a big impact on him. Plus, he is learning to get to places on his own and on time."

A graduate of Buffalo City Honors School and the Occupational Training Center, Aaron, age 22, volunteers at the Salvation Army Church in Tonawanda. He helps to organize their food pantry, cleans and enjoys talking with the church's elderly members. A resident of South Buffalo, Aaron is currently looking for a job and hopes to find one that focuses on stocking and organizing items. When Aaron is not with friends, he enjoys exercising, shopping and bike riding with his dad who, Aaron says, gives great advice. Aaron's favorite?

"The only bright side in your life is the path you choose."

"It's great advice for everyone," said Aaron.

To learn more about the People Inc. Guys Group, contact Nick Cacciotti, life quality coach, at [ncacciotti@people-inc.org](mailto:ncacciotti@people-inc.org) or call 716-880-3776.

## Tips for Families Who Have Loved Ones with Developmental Disabilities

March is Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month



In recognition of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, Kenmore resident Aimee Levesque, the mom of an individual who is supported by People Inc., shares why it is important for families to advocate for their loved ones. Aimee's daughter, Jessica, is a participant of People Inc.'s Arts Experience Program, former participant of the agency's Young Adult Life Transitions Program and currently involved with its Self-Advocacy Program. Both fans of the arts, Aimee is co-founder and managing director and Jessica is an actor of Unique Productions, a company of artists that aspires to promote community integration through the arts by providing individuals with disabilities a chance to be artists, actors and writers.

"Parents are the best advocates for their children. You are an expert on 'all things your child,' play an important role in their education, and get to reap the rewards of their love and affection. As a parent advocate, there are many things that you can do, including:

- 1. Learn about your child's disability and teach them about their disability, too.** How many times have you heard the saying, 'knowledge is power?' The more you and your child know about their disability, the better advocates you both will be. Use the Internet, books and brochures to teach your child; use anything you feel will help them understand. Be accurate, consistent and honest with them if they ask questions.
- 2. Know your child's abilities.** We are often forced to focus on what our children cannot do to get the services that they need, in-and outside of school, but what about the great things they CAN do? Focus on the positives and on all of the terrific things that your child can do, has achieved and will continue to grow at.
- 3. Keep records.** Save copies of your child's Individualized Education Plans, reports and samples of their school work. Take notes while on phone calls or in meetings. Put all of these items in a large binder. These materials may be helpful for showing where your child might have some difficulties or may highlight the areas where they have strengths. If you are not the best at keeping things organized or need help getting started, local parent groups and organizations may offer 'Binder Trainings.'
- 4. Have goals for your child.** Just like every other student, your child will have goals and aspirations, so encourage them to set them. Also, include your child in the goal and decision-making processes as often as you can. Self-determination is a key component in the progression toward independence. If your child is unable to articulate goals to you, then creating these goals may become your responsibility, so do your homework.
- 5. Allow yourself to feel and display emotions.** Repeat after me, 'it is okay to cry, it is okay to get angry and it is okay to be happy.' Believe it or not, it is very easy for parents of children with disabilities to repress emotions because they may feel that the emotions will get in the way of powerful advocacy. Not only is repressing emotions terrible for your health, but it can also be counterproductive to your advocacy efforts. You cannot be an effective advocate if you are stuck in a cycle of painful and destructive emotions. If you don't think you can do it on your own, speak with a professional.



**6. Join parent groups.** Parent groups – online or in person – serve many purposes. They provide the opportunity to meet families that are walking similar paths. You can share resources, discuss similar situations, laugh and cry together. In essence, parent groups are a place of help, love and support.

**7. Take care of yourself!** Meetings, doctor's appointments, therapy sessions – most days we find ourselves being pulled in what feels like a million different directions and the last thing we think about are ourselves. But what help can we be if we are sick or overstressed? It is important to make sure that our needs as parents are met, too. So keep those health-related appointments, get to the gym, act in a play or take a yoga class. The bottom line is: take care of YOU."

Aimee Levesque is a parent advocate. She has worked in the disability field in Western New York for more than 15 years. She is co-founder and managing director of Unique Productions (UP!), a company of artists that aspires to promote community integration through the arts by providing individuals with disabilities a chance to be artists, actors and writers. A resident of Kenmore, NY, Levesque is currently enrolled at the University at Buffalo as a PhD candidate for the Curriculum Instruction and the Sciences of Learning Program.

People Inc. is a not-for-profit health and human services agency providing programs and services to more than 12,000 people with special needs, their families and seniors throughout Western New York. Since 1971, People Inc. has assisted individuals to achieve greater degrees of independence and productivity.

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## **Public Notice**

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### **"New Opportunities!**

The Regional Office in conjunction with People Inc. and a local family are looking for a special person to make a contribution in the life of a senior citizen they support.

John is a 61-year-old gentleman, with special needs. He resides in the two-bedroom apartment of the family home in which he was raised. He would like to remain in the home, but needs assistance with general household task, cooking, and supervision at night. He would also like companionship.

The apartment is located in a quiet, safe neighborhood in Buffalo south towns, on several bus routes, within walking distance of a park and a grocery store. John enjoys listening to music, going out to eat, watching TV, playing board games, cards, and reading magazines.

This opportunity is open to someone who is interested in moving into John's home, to assist John with daily living and to be available at night if needed. Funding is available to provide payment for services rendered and full or partial assistance with Room and Board may also be available.

If you are interested or if you know of someone who would be interested in this opportunity, please contact Jackie at 716-570-4513 for more information.

(OPWDD is not responsible for the content in this section)



### **Shining Stars Gallery**

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#### **Congratulations to our Most Recent Employees of the Month Nominees**

December: William Hitchner, DSA and George Jablonski, Hab Spec 2

January: Joyce Brooks, DA2 and Brittany Green, DA2

February: Erin Schrader, Hab Spec 1 and Diane Bounamici, DA2

Congratulations to Amy Schmidt, TTL, who was promoted to a DDPS4 position working with Region 1 Day Programs

#### **Staff Comings and Goings**

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##### **Retirements:**

##### **December:**

William Evans  
Kuni Holtz  
Kimberly Ferguson  
Leslie Blandford  
Helen Chichester  
Patricia Strosnider  
Charles Maddock  
Joy Dixon  
Shirley Craig  
Elvira Laut  
Glenn White

##### **Januray:**

Agnes Bullard  
Charles Voelkl  
Evaline Douglas  
Mary Perkins  
Candace Urf  
Denise Noe  
Yvonne Salter  
Lisa Cudihy  
Suzanne Clark  
Cheryl Winter  
Bernadette Kurzawski  
Patricia Swanick

##### **February:**

Joyce Brooks  
Eileen Cassidy  
David Baker

**THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR YEARS OF SERVICE!!!**





