

The Resource

December 20, 2006

FOR PERSPECTIVE AND ANALYSIS

The Source of information for providers of community-based services for people with differing abilities.
A member service of NYSRA.

A LEGISLATIVE LOOK-AHEAD

By Jeff Wise, NYSRA President & CEO

The year comes to a close with a new governor preparing to take office, a state health care system that awaits likely closures and mergers, and a legislature standing by – with the rest of us – to see what direction the state’s budget and executive policy will take.

Eliot Spitzer will take office January 1 and the 2007 Legislative Session will be under way two days later. NYSRA is already anticipating what the new governor may have to say in his State of the State address on that day.

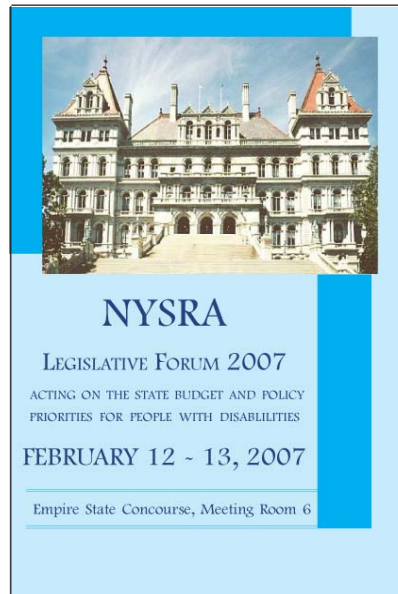
In the meantime, we can while away the waiting by looking back on 2006 and the year that was. It was, by most accounts, a good one for NYSRA. And where it could have been better, we have plans to make it so in the coming months.

January brought us a governor releasing a budget for the final time and, undoubtedly, his final plan was one designed to leave an executive legacy after 12 years in office. His proposal was devoid of major cuts. It even included – finally – a cost-of-living adjustment for many programs for which adjustments had been sought for virtually his entire tenure in office. The Legislature found the budget plan largely palatable and, for once, the entire process was a reasonably rational one.

NYSRA’s Legislative Forum last February gave all our members a chance to weigh in matters like the COLA and to reinforce the message that, when it comes to caring for New Yorkers with special needs, our members are partners with state policymakers in filling those needs. Special “lobby days” in March for the NYSRA Vocational, Developmental Disabilities, and Mental Health Divisions helped greatly to press the point. From a qualitative standpoint, these days were invaluable to pressing our agenda with legislators and staff. From a quantitative one, we were reminded that there is always room for more participation from our members – and we urge all of them to engage as much as they can when these lobby days cycle around again this March. Given the devoted work of our expanding and newly energized Legislative Committee, there is little doubt that the next season will be one that further solidifies NYSRA as an influential voice in legislative and agency policy. The committee’s members, including tireless and selfless

co-chairs of the NYSRA divisions, have done a great deal to demonstrate that our member-driven advocacy program is one committed to effectiveness through engagement.

Nothing gets legislators’ attention better than first-person visits from our membership. No one carries the message better than the people in the field.



On the membership front, NYSRA enjoyed a good year with agencies returning to our roster and expanding our numbers. We have every intention of adding more to the list during 2007.

During 2006, more than our membership numbers increased. Participation at our annual June Executive Management Team meeting in Saratoga Springs surpassed 100 participants, up noticeably from recent years. And our annual Leadership Training Summit in mid-September included some 600 participants from all reaches of the rehabilitation field – a truly gratifying response to the efforts of NYSRA and RRTI to make our annual gathering an enjoyable and educational effort.

Our conference saw the final appearance of Thomas Maul as commissioner of OMRDD in our midst. The former commissioner was most gracious in accepting an Achievement Award from NYSRA, and in agreeing to lend his name to a new award to be inaugurated this year – the Thomas A. Maul Award Recognizing Self-Advocacy. His absence from the commissioner’s office will be greatly felt this year – he has worked in the field for decades – but we salute Commissioner Maul for all the efforts and initiatives that mark him as a true visionary leader. He will be missed, but his legacy will undoubtedly be strong enough to lasting impact for years to come.

And as we head toward 2007, we do so with a new slate of NYSRA officers that guarantees success. Board Chair Hanns Meissner, Vice Chair Jim Bellanca, Secretary Linda Turner, and Treasurer Maureen Bentley all are committed and experienced leaders who will carry on principles of sound association stewardship. They head up a Board of Directors with an uncommon level of energy, and can rest assured they direct a staff that is ready, willing and able to move NYSRA forward as we head into the “new” Albany and the changing Washington. We trust you will join us.

RSA MAKES ANNUAL REVIEW REPORTS AVAILABLE

The Rehabilitation Services Administration has made available the Annual Review Report from each state for FY2005. These comprehensive reports give much detail on who was served and placed and where the state vocational rehabilitation agencies spent their money. PWI's that serve state VR clients may want to note that the PWI outcomes may be part of the total number placed by the state agency.

The reports are available online and can be accessed as follows:

ARR Instructions:

- Open web browser; Internet Explorer, Netscape, etc.
- In the address box toward the top of the page, type in www.rsadev.net
- On the RSA MIS Welcome page, click the blue, underlined "Annual Review Reports for FY 2005" button in the center of the page.
- On the RSA Main Menu page, select the state agency you wish to view and click the blue, underlined "View" button under the "Actions" column.
- The Annual Review Report for your selected state agency opens up.
- You may read the complete ARR on the screen or click on any of the underlined text in the "Table of Contents" section to jump directly to that portion of the ARR.

To print the complete ARR, click the "Format for Printing" button, wait until the Department logo appears, then press the *control* plus *P* keys to print the report. After it prints, use the "Back" button in your browser (Internet Explorer, Netscape, etc.) to return to the Main Menu.

If you have problems, please click on the button on the left side menu on the screen entitled "MIS Technical Support".

VISIT NYSRA ON THE WEB AT

WWW.NYREHAB.ORG

WEGMANS HONORED

The New York State Rehabilitation Association (NYSRA) named Wegmans Food Markets as the recipient of the 2006 State Recognition Award - Corporate Business. Nominated by Aspire of Western New York, a NYSRA member agency, Wegmans was honored for being a true partner in employing individuals with disabilities.

"Wegmans understands and supports the unique challenges these employees face," said Thomas Sy, executive director for Aspire. "Through their partnership, Wegmans has provided a place for individuals with disabilities to grow and impact their community as team members of this major regional supermarket chain."



(From left to right) Anne Spisiak, director of OMRDD planning & development for Heritage Centers; May Ann Arsell, coordinator of vocational services for Aspire; Bill Schulz, director of employment & training programs for People Inc.; Carl Scanlon, Jr., store manager for Wegmans Dick Road; and Thomas Sy, executive director for Aspire.

Representatives from Aspire of WNY, Heritage Centers and People Inc. presented the award to Wegmans at its Dick Road store in Depew. Carl Scanlon, store manager, is proud of Wegmans' relationship with local nonprofit agencies that serve people with developmental disabilities. "But we are even more proud of the valuable employees who have joined Wegmans' workforce as a result," he said.

Aspire of WNY (formerly the United Cerebral Palsy Association) is a comprehensive provider of programs and services for adults and children with developmental disabilities including, but not limited to: cerebral palsy, mental retardation, epilepsy, autism, traumatic brain injury and other neurological impairments. Aspire envisions full participation of individuals with disabilities so that they may live their lives to the fullest in keeping with their informed choices. The agency employs approximately 1,400 people in locations throughout Western New York. For more information, visit www.aspirewny.org.



ENLIGHTENED AT LAST ABOUT GROUP HOMES

Courtesy of the Buffalo News - Written by Bruce Andriatch

When work crews were building a People Inc. group home for developmentally disabled people on Grand Island about 16 years ago, it didn't take long to figure out how the guy across the street felt. Every time they were there, he would make it a point to wave to them - with his middle finger.

When the home was finished and the agency held an open house, the man's opinion apparently had changed; he offered his property as a parking lot.

Not long after that, the man stopped in to say he was looking for a job. He was hired to do maintenance.

James Boles, the agency's chief executive officer, likes to tell that story, not because it's unusual, but because it has become a common tale. Call it the three stages of group home news: virulent opposition, grudging acceptance, welcome to the neighborhood.

The stories about meetings in which a crowd shows up to oppose a group home on their street are not as frequent as they used to be. It could be that the reputations of group homes as good neighbors have spread. It could be that people have learned that it doesn't do much good to oppose them; the only reason a group home cannot be located at a site is if the area is saturated with them or if it would create a substantial alteration to the neighborhood. Both criteria are difficult to prove. Or it could be that their fears are unfounded. Property values don't go down. There isn't more noise. Children are as safe as they ever were. "We wouldn't be able to stay in a community if the opposition kept up," Boles said. "But there hasn't been a lot of horrible stuff."

People Inc. operates 90 group homes with 675 residents in Erie County alone, the majority of them in suburban communities. Several other private organizations and the state also operate group homes. By last count, there were 570 in the Western New York region serving 3,500 people, and the number is only going up, according to the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. Rhonda Frederick has attended every group home site meeting for People Inc. in the last 15 years. Frederick, the agency's chief operating officer, has seen the change in community acceptance firsthand. "The last five years have been a little more civilized," she says with the sigh of relief of a woman who remembers when that was not the case. In earlier days, Frederick was there to educate and answer questions, but she became a human punching bag when neighbors didn't want the facility anywhere near them. After trying approaches that didn't work, she became a minimalist: Describe the house and how it would operate and then answer the questions about staff, traffic, parking, sewage and safety before anyone asked.

When the agency wanted to locate a group home on a dead-end street in West Seneca in 2003, Lois Spellman collected a petition with the signatures of 100 opponents. She said she feared for the safety of her children and the home's residents, citing increased traffic.

Three years later, the house is operating, and she still has concerns. She said there is more traffic and there are more cars parked on the street than before. "All in all, it hasn't been such a bad experience," she said. "It turned out better than I hoped it would."

Frederick speaks periodically to a class on disabilities at the University at Buffalo and tells stories about some of her worst public meetings. Lately, she has noticed that the stories get older and that she doesn't have new ones. That's a trend she wouldn't mind seeing continue.

"My hope is that as younger people are in school with people with disabilities and disabled people are more integrated into their lives, maybe people won't be so afraid," Frederick said.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/OPPORTUNITIES

NEW RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Blindline is a fully accessible website (www.blindline.org) created by VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in collaboration with the American Foundation for the Blind to provide direct access to a New York statewide database of organizations products, and services for people who are blind or visually impaired, their family members, counselors, and other professionals. Additionally the services includes a toll-free telephone number (888-625-1616).

The website is helpful in accessing:

- Museums with audio and tactile exhibits
- Restaurants with Braille menus
- Local government and social service offices
- Recreational facilities
- Rehabilitation agencies

If a particular information request cannot be found in the internal database, a Blindline Information Specialist will continue to research the subject, and will return any findings to the caller in his or her preferred format (voice, email, Braille, large or standard size print). Blindline also serves as a vocational training program, designed to enhance the performance skills of the volunteers, who themselves are blind and visually impaired. The Blindline call center is available Monday - Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information or to learn how you can become a Blindline Information Specialist contact Michael J. Cush, Blindline Coordinator at (888) 625-1616 ext. 710, mcush@blindline.info.

CHILD DAY CARE CENTER FUNDING (OCFS)

OCFS is making available a series of grant opportunities to expand the availability of and/or improve the quality of care in regulated child care settings. The specific funding categories include: Child Day Care Center and School Age Start Up and Expansion Programs; Expansion of Hours of Existing Child Day Care Centers and School Age Child Care Programs; Health and Safety Grants; Innovative Programs Initiative and Accreditation Grants. **ELIGIBILITY:** All categories except for the Innovative Programs Initiative are open to not-for-profit and for-profit child day care centers, school age child care programs other not-for-profit organizations and government agencies. The Innovative Programs Initiative category is limited to government and not-for-profit organizations. **FUNDING:** Contact the Office of Children and Family Services for funding details. **DEADLINE:** Applications for all program types, except Health and Safety grants \$15,000 and under, will be accepted on March 16, 2007 and July 14, 2007. Applications may be submitted for Health and Safety grants \$15,000 and under by the 10th of each month ending with submissions on June 10, 2007. **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Contact Suzanne Sennett, Bureau of Early Childhood Services, 52 Washington Street, N. Building, Room 338, Rensselaer, New York 12144; phone (518) 474-9454.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER (COO): The COO reports directly to the CEO and is a resource to the CEO and Board of Directors. The COO is directly responsible for the multi-faceted, goal-oriented services and programs provided by Liberty. The individual must have at least a BA degree (masters degree preferred) in fields such as education (special), psychology, social work, public health administration, nonprofit management, business administration, public policy, health care administration or other similar related field. At least 10 years experience in a top management position in a multi-million dollar organization with budgeting, personnel management and fiscal control responsibilities. Familiarity and with Medicaid funding of services for people with DD. Possess working understanding and experiences with the unique needs and services for people with DD and familiarity with the Standards of Quality as prescribed by The Council on Quality and Leadership. Excellent communication skills, with the ability to motivate and interact with staff is required. Experience as a team leader and builder. Must have a valid drivers license and automobile. Liberty offers a competitive compensation to include, retirement, health and disability insurances and a car allowance. Send cover letter, resume and salary history to: info@tilnonprof.com (attach files only in Microsoft Word). Be sure to list subject as "Liberty COO". Or mail to Transitions In Leadership, 2371 Baxton Way, Chesterfield, MO 63017.

AW 2 CAREERS PROJECT - CAREER SPECIALIST: This position is an initiative being developed by the National Organization on Disability working in collaboration with the US Army to develop a careers demonstration for the Army's Wounded Warriors — the most severely injured men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The demonstration will be launched in three regions in early 2007. As part of this initiative, NOD is seeking a Career Specialist who will work with AW2 staff and their partner agencies (including the VA, Department of Labor VETS program, and staff at Walter Reed Army Medical Center) in Washington and across the country to enhance their efforts to support soldiers' and family members' pursuit of rewarding careers. This position may be a contracted or staff position.

The ideal candidate would:

- Have practical career guidance experience including expertise in education and workforce development programs;
- Have experience helping young adults with disabilities find and keep jobs;
- Have a solid understanding of the military and military culture:

The ideal candidate will be practical, outcomes-oriented, forward looking and able to work with others in a variety of settings. The career advisor will be based in Washington DC and will begin work with NOD as a consultant working three days a week.

Please send a resume and cover letter to:
ToddM@nod.org.

NYSRA CALENDAR

February 2007

February 12 & 13
NYSRA's Legislative Forum, Albany

June 2007

June 5 & 6
NYSRA's Executive Team Management Institute

September 2007

September 24 - 26
NYSRA's Leadership Training Summit, The Desmond, Albany

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