



Photo Credit: Staff at TST BOCES

Turning Point Turns 30!

Racker's Partnership with TST BOCES Has a Remarkable Birthday

A message from Mary Hutchens, former Director of Counseling for School Success

In the 1980's the look of Special Education was changing dramatically. More and more students with a disability were being supported in their home schools with creative and practical services that addressed barriers to their full participation in learning. At the same time, the number of students with serious social-emotional needs appeared to be growing. Schools tried different approaches, but realized that for a small group of these students, a more specialized program would be helpful.

When our local school districts approached Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES about this need, it was logical that Racker would be invited to join the conversation. Since the 1960's, Racker and TST BOCES had shared a strong and collaborative partnership. We had come together to share space, to share staff and perhaps most importantly, we shared values, trust and a dedication to supporting students with disabilities as they made their way through school.

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SPRING 2019 INSIDE LOOK:

- TURNING POINT TURNS 30! • EQUINE THERAPY • HOLIDAY BASKETS
- AUTISM LENDING LIBRARY • PLAYING IT FORWARD • FOOD DAY
- AND MORE!



from the desk of
Cris Donovan

growth—the process of developing physically, mentally, or spiritually

Growing up in Maryland, March actually meant Spring. Robins would come, the daffodils would pop up, and azaleas would bloom. Since Spring here in New York doesn't necessarily come when the calendar changes to March (or April), I try to look for signs of Spring everywhere I go to help me through a long grey March. I constantly seek out opportunities to see new growth and sunny flowers. This issue of the Outlook helps.

There is always growth and renewal here at Racker. We see it in the people we support and in our staff. A child tasting new foods, saying their first words, or taking their first steps. A staff member mastering a new skill and sharing that skill with others. A teenager getting their first job. A person with a disability moving into their own apartment. Growth happens every day. In this issue of the Outlook, you'll read about a 30 year old partnership born out of a commitment to children and to making a difference for them and their families. You'll learn about new ways to connect with youth using animal assisted therapy. And you'll see a team renewing their commitment to each other and the people they support. These all sound like signs of Spring to me.

These days, change is everywhere. Our service systems are changing under our feet. New technology means new things to learn and new ways to work. For some of us, change can bring along discomfort, fears, and concerns for the future. It also brings something amazing.

Change brings growth. Change cultivates new opportunities. And change brings Spring, with blooming flowers, singing birds, radiant sunshine, and reconnecting with others. 🌱

- Cris Donovan, Associate Executive Director of Racker

SPOTLIGHT

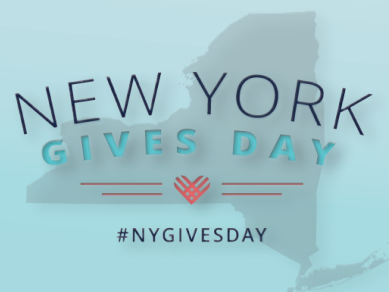


THE GIVING TREE

Cindy Henderson, Care Manager Team Leader at Racker, works with St. Catherine of Sienna's every year to match participants' needs to gifts from the congregation. It's been a long, celebrated tradition and we are always amazed by the generosity!

Sisters from the Alpha Xi Delta sorority at Cornell were special guests at the Margaret Gibson Preschool! The sisters spent some time reading with the kids in the our different classrooms. They donated several Sensory Stories to our classrooms. Thank you for your support to our Early Childhood programs!

ALPHA XI DELTA AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY



Because of you, our generous supporters, we were able to raise 112% of our goal on #NYGivesDay! M&T Bank pledged to match every dollar donated up to \$2,500, and we beat that goal!

This Day of Giving was a 24-hour fundraising challenge amongst non-profits in NY. Our #NYGivesDay campaign was for our Early Childhood program. In just 24 hours we were able to put \$5,290 towards a great program that is so important to so many families and their little ones!



Spring Edition presented
in FULL COLOR by



Thirty Years at Turning Point How It All Started



*Mary Hutchens - Former Director
Counseling for School Success*

Continued from front cover...

Mike Pronti, the Director of Exceptional Education at the time, started the ball rolling. In conversations with Roger Sibley, the Executive Director at Racker and myself, we learned that Mike wanted to offer a comprehensive and therapeutic experience for the students. While behavior was what everyone saw, Mike intuitively knew that to make lasting change, behavior management systems weren't enough.

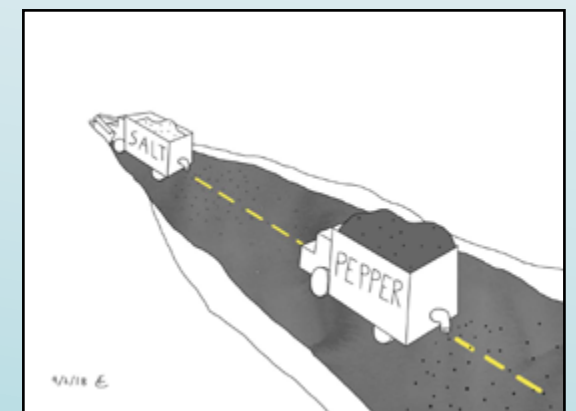
He knew it was important to understand the underlying issues and we needed to involve and support parents in this healing process. From our past experiences together, we all understood that by sharing our different expertise and working on teams with staff in different roles, our efforts would be more integrated and our impact could be greater.

We were on a journey. We toured different program models around the state, read articles about what students needed and hosted meetings of stakeholders and decision-makers. We agreed that a Day Treatment model offered us what we were looking for. Day Treatment emphasizes the ability of mental health staff to respond as issues arise in the student's school day with a focus on understanding the needs that are being expressed and learning new, more positive skills to cope with strong feelings. It emphasizes the value of family involvement and the contribution of other community supports. By being in a school, it recognizes the importance of education as a primary task of a child's development. If they could be successful in school, so many opportunities open. Day Treatment sounded right for us and right for the students and families we wanted to support.

The process of working from the conceptual conversations to the opening of Turning Point in 1988 took a few years. There were a lot of obstacles to figure out, but we stayed the course. Figuring it out required the commitment and creativity of so many people in our community.

For 30 years we have been "a work in progress." Our Racker mental health staff and TST education staff work closely on teams. Together we learn about better ways to understand the needs of our students and ways we can be more helpful. Our teams work through conflicts, we negotiate priorities, we support each other. We get energy from being the best we can be.

Today Racker serves over 100 students each year at Turning Point and we have a sister program at Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES in Cortland. Our staff is rich with creativity and passion. Who knows where our next collaboration will lead! 🌱



Ethan Carlson is a sophomore at Ithaca High School. As an individual on the autism spectrum, Ethan sees the world a bit differently than most people. For instance, this is especially seen in his cartoons. Ethan's drawings are purposefully minimalist in order to make readers focus less on the imagery, and more on the humor that is ingrained in it. Many of his cartoons focus on the absurdity of everyday life, while others examine the irony of surreal situations. For the past year and a half, Ethan has been publishing comics in his highschool's magazine: *IHS Tattler*.

Ethan has expressed interest in becoming a volunteer in helping autistic children or students; He has even considered helping in some way related to art education.

Thank you Ethan for sharing your excellent cartoons with us! 🌱



Racker's Advocacy Initiative

With the release of Governor Cuomo’s budget in January, Racker, and agencies across the state like Racker, were upset to see that a “cost of living adjustment (COLA)” for direct care workers was not included. It has been an ongoing battle to convey to the Governor how sub-standard pay affects Racker’s ability to hire and retain direct care staff. The challenging work these direct care workers provide day in and day out demands a living wage. And because of this inadequate compensation, Racker and many other agencies are experiencing a “staffing crisis”, struggling to fill the open positions needed to run these important programs. The Governor assured increases each year to get wages to a “living wage” and with his omission of that increase in his 2019/20 budget, our outrage must turn to advocacy.

A little history: Many of the programs that Racker provides are mandated services that New York State, by law, has to provide to people with disabilities in our community. New York State contracts with Racker to see that these programs are made available, and provides the funding. In essence, we are in partnership with New York State to run these critical programs. It is infuriating that we have to keep going back and stating our case, imploring the Governor to do what he said he would do – provide the necessary funding so we can provide direct care workers with a salary commensurate to the important work they provide for people with disabilities.

By the time you read this we will have made calls, visited legislators, and sent letters to the Governor. We will have reached out to our local representatives asking for their help. We will have traveled to Albany with families and people we serve, giving them the opportunity to speak directly with their representatives – telling their story – expressing how important direct care workers are to their quality of life, sharing how it feels when critical staff keep leaving because they can’t afford to be a direct care worker and do the work they love.

Hopefully you have had a chance to participate in this effort. Maybe you wrote a letter to the Governor, or made a call. Maybe you sent a letter to the editor of your local paper. Thank you! There is still a lot to do. Our advocacy work will continue till the budget is voted on at the end of March. We must make sure the funding for increasing direct care workers pay is included.

Help us make sure that the voices of people with disabilities and the compassionate workers who provide their services are being heard – especially by Governor Cuomo! 🙏

If you would like to get involved email Perri LoPinto, Director of Donor and Government Relations, at perri@racker.org

Autism Lending Library

Provides opportunities to try out sensory items prior to purchasing them - New at A.L.L.:

- Bubble Tubes provide soothing light, movement, and sound which can help provide a sense of calm and promote visual stimulation.
- Color-changing lights and projectors provide slow-moving visual stimulation, which has a calming effect.
- “Mermaid” or sequin pillows offer tactile feedback and soothing textures during moments of sensory overload or anxiety.
- A large beanbag (or in this case, a Hugibo named “Stanley”) provides gentle calming pressure against and under the body. The Hugibo can provide safe hugs and also acts as a chair.
- “White noise” machines can be calming, especially when combined with a color-changing projector in a darkened room.



For full access to the Library's inventory or for more information please email LendingLibrary@racker.org

Residential: PLAYING IT FORWARD

Tioga County Residential Regional Director Kristy Robbins-Barrows is encouraging residential staff and team members to Play It Forward and engage more with each other and their communities!

Kristy states, "After looking up fun ways to encourage employee engagement, we came across a card game called Sneaky Cards. Sneaky Cards makes your city and wherever you travel a game board! If you are given a Sneaky Card, your mission, should you choose to accept it: is to become a secret agent of joy, spreading art and intrigue to an unsuspecting public. The cards inside the box become an interactive scavenger hunt that inspires creativity and rewards audacity!"

Complete each objective and then pass the card along to an unwitting accomplice, who now becomes part of the game! The fun is ever-expanding, but it all starts with you to play it forward! So how do you know when someone has “played it forward?” Each deck comes with a tracking number for the entire deck as well as a tracking number for each card included in the deck.

Since starting this engaging game in Tioga County, the cards have traveled throughout the county. "It has been a fun way to spread some positivity and engagement, both inside and outside of Racker." 🙏

COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

- Cortland - Thursday, May 2nd
Cortland Repertory Theatre
24 Port Watson St, Cortland, NY 13045
- Tioga - Thursday, May 30th
Tioga Downs Casino
2384 W River Rd, Nichols, NY 13812
- Tompkins - Thursday, October 10th
Ithaca College
953 Danby Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850

Prices for Tioga and Cortland
\$15 for Community Members
\$7 for Staff

Free for people we support
and their accompanying staff

This year we are happy to continue our tradition of celebrating all that makes the work we do at Racker possible: our great communities, committed staff, business visionaries, and of course the caring families and the individuals we support.

Registration for each celebration opens one month beforehand.
Accommodations, registration, and further details will be available at www.racker.org/events

CONFERENCE



Al Condeluci
Thursday, April 11th

The Power of Relationships

Join Al Condeluci as he discusses the importance of relationships to individuals with developmental disabilities.

All families want their loved one to be successful. Learning how to harness the power of relationships ensures a lasting impact and benefit for years without worry.

Although none of us can predict the future, we can look at ways and means to better prepare for the future by understanding the impact of friendships in our lives.

Free for families and
Self-Advocates
Professionals
\$15

Registration
at
www.racker.org

Greek Peak Mountain Resort Acropolis Room • 2000 State Rt. 392 Cortland, NY



Photo Courtesy of Ned Dykes

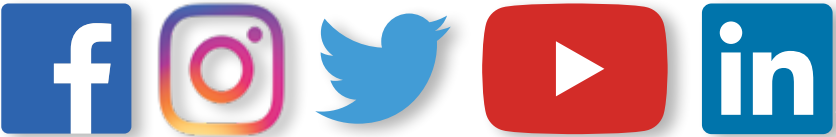
We're proud to announce another year of one of our most fun fundraising events. **Racker Rivals Big Red** is held at Lynah Rink at Cornell University. Some of our favorite celebrity players are taking part again this year! We look forward to another fun and exciting event for the whole community!

Opportunities exist for businesses and individuals to sponsor at a variety of levels.

For more information, please contact Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations and Development, at 607-272-5891 Ext. 224 or by email at bobb@racker.org

Let's Get Social!

Follow Racker on social media to keep up to date with our latest news, celebrations, service info, employment opportunities, and more!



A Horse of Course!



The Counseling for School Success and After Hours Programs in Cortland are stepping outside the box and into the arena when it comes to providing innovative interventions for youth. Always with the goal of fostering improved health and emotional wellness through hands on experiences, two unique programs that build on the animal-human connection, specifically Equine Therapy, are showing promising results for Racker program participants.



For the past 2 years, staff from Racker and OCM BOCES have collaborated with Orenda Springs Experiential Learning Center in Marcellus, NY, providing middle school students with educational and mental health support in this unique woodland/horse farm setting. Following a three week immersion program in the summer, the students continue their “Hero’s Journey” one day a week through the school year. Racker’s own Clinical Social Worker, Susan Thomas, and Orenda’s Equine Specialist, Olga Powers, have been instrumental in bringing Equine Assisted Therapy and Learning to Orenda Springs. Susan describes the power of using horses to educate and promote mental health:

“Because horses are highly intelligent and instinctively react to our body language, the immediate feedback they offer is very effective in helping [the kids] become more self-aware. Students explore and practice skills that build confidence and teach emotional self-management. Lessons are structured around concepts such as building healthy relationships, personal safety, boundary setting, cultivating empathy and practicing relaxation and mindfulness. Participants leave sessions with valuable feedback they can then transfer to other areas in their lives.”

Equine Assisted Therapies and Learning opportunities have grown in popularity over the past 10 years and Racker staff are leading the way in Central New York. If you are interested in learning more about how Equine Therapy might enhance your life or someone you care about, feel free to email Susan Thomas at Susantcss@racker.org



Photo credit: Josh Waldbly, WCNY

Susan interviews with WCNY for the Cycle of Life series. Watch the segment: Season 10 Episode 4 at <http://www.wcny.org/television/cycleofhealth>



Steve and Kathy Lipinski with Racker's Care Management Team ready to deliver gift basket donations!

Sharing Holiday Cheer

2018 marked many years in a row of special gift basket donations from Mr. and Mrs. Lipinski. The Lipinski family is always happy to make this donation to families who experience hardships during the year.

Racker's Care Management team smiles and cheers when they each loaded up their individual cars with the gift baskets. These donations traveled to families in need in all of the counties that we serve. The baskets were overflowing and many hands made light work of the deliveries! Thank you to Steve and Kathy for your support during the holiday season!



Food Day

was started by former finance professional, Chris Loucks, as a fun way to celebrate the holidays at the Administrative offices. Even after his retirement, the tradition (favored by many) lives on! Food Day 2018 was filled with creative displays and decorations, tasty treats, and fancy sweaters!

- Best Sweater went to Cathe Oberlander and Jules Doliscar
- For the 5th year running, the *Bah Humbug Award* went to Cris Donovan and Perri LoPinto
- Best group theme was awarded to the *Family Support team*, decked out as *Clue*
- Tastiest sweet dish was awarded to the *Residential department*, themed as *Survivor*
- Tastiest savory dish was awarded to the *IT/RN department*, creatively themed as *Tailgaters*



Cortland Holiday Ball



Seen here are people from our residential program, families, as well as staff from Tioga, Cortland, and Tompkins counties.

If you couldn't tell, they celebrated the holidays in style!



SPRING 2019

OUTLOOK

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Don't Forget to ROLLOVER your charitable IRA distribution!



If you are 70 1/2 or older, a great way to support Racker might also be a great way to save on your taxes! Your annual IRA distribution can be sent directly to support the causes that are important to you and won't be counted as earned income – a win, win! For more information, talk to your financial advisor. Some restrictions apply!

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