

QUARTERLY | Fall 2019

OUTLOOK Racker

WWW.RACKER.ORG

Supporting People with Disabilities

The Partnership Program

15th
ANNIVERSARY
2004 2019



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prog•ress—to develop to a higher, better, or more advanced stage

Racker staff are the major fuel to the success of our mission and vision. It's because of the extensive expertise, knowledge base, and dedication of our staff that we are able to go above and beyond in supporting people with disabilities and their families to lead fulfilling lives. To continue being able to create opportunities for Racker participants to learn and be connected with others comes with substantial responsibility. It is our duty to ensure consistent staff development opportunities and sustain an adequately staffed team.

While Racker continues to support the needs of our communities, we have been faced with growing challenges internally that have made it difficult at times to maintain well trained and consistent staffing. A combination of factors has made this particularly hard:

1. **Low reimbursement rates from NYS have impacted our ability to pay staff adequately for the great and difficult work that they do.**
2. **The increase in the minimum wage by 40% in four years has greatly increased the competition for individuals entering the workforce, because our starting wage is no longer significantly different than other jobs.**
3. **The very strong economy that has resulted in the lowest unemployment rates in decades.**

The confluence of these three things has made it very difficult for us to recruit, hire, and retain staff. (This is not just a Racker problem, my colleagues around New York State and across the country are reporting job vacancy rates from 25% to 40%). Four years ago we had 954 employees, and today we have 884 employees, 70 fewer. Most of our programs have not been shrinking, so the loss of those staff directly impacts our ability to support individuals and their families so deserving of quality services.

There is no miracle cure to this problem. If there was, we along with our colleagues, would have cured this already. What we're doing is actively challenging ourselves to completely rethink how we recruit, hire and retain our staff, Racker's most vital resource. With a newly revamped recruiting and hiring process we have seen the number of job applicants double and have hired over 50 new staff in just a few months! This is VERY good news.

We are now putting even more energy and focus into retaining staff. This is critical because while we hired 51 staff in that time frame, we have lost 44 staff, which roughly translates to only 7 vacancies being filled. While some of the staff turnover is associated with annual seasonal changes related to beginning of summer, not all of it is attributable to that. Our goal is to cut the loss of staff in half, thereby enabling us to rebuild our critical resource, STAFF. This will directly impact our ability to help people we support lead a fulfilling life. 🌱

Dan Brown

Dan Brown, Racker Executive Director



To browse over thirty open employment opportunities in Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties please visit www.racker.org/employment

- Direct Support Professionals
- Community Support Professionals
- Care Companions
- Preschool Special Education Teachers
- Regional Directors
- Maintenance Worker
- Day Treatment Counselors

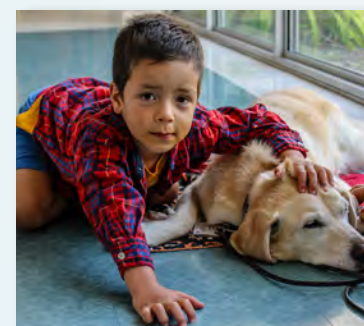
and more...

For more info call 607.272.5891 or visit www.racker.org/employment

The Partnership Program: Fifteenth Anniversary

July 2019 marks fifteen years of Racker's Partnership Program! This groundbreaking program was the first of its kind in New York State to offer a fully integrated preschool classroom setting where children on the autism spectrum could learn alongside their typically developing peers. A group of parents in the early 2000s were frustrated with the lack of integrated opportunities for their children in the area and sought out the support and advocacy of local school districts, Early Intervention providers, and Racker's Board of Directors. Inspired by the enthusiasm of these parents and educators, Racker launched the Partnership Program on July 12, 2004. With the success of the program in Ithaca, a second classroom opened to support children and families in Cortland County just a year later.

All classrooms within Racker's Early Childhood Services are integrated and support children with autism. However, the Partnership Program's unique structure allows teachers to utilize Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) - a methodology that has shown great success for kids on the spectrum. ABA helps children develop important skills such as kindergarten readiness, lifelong learning, forming relationships, and actively participating in community life.



Renee Zonder, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, explains that ABA allows teachers to "think about how students learn and react to their environment holistically." ABA uses a variety of formats including intensive one-on-one instruction, small group activities, child-initiated interactions, play, peer

modeling, family skill-building, and family support. Judy, the mother of a Partnership Program graduate, said that "The Partnership Program was, without question, so integral to my child's early development. The communication flow between the staff and families was possibly the best aspect of this whole experience."

Partnership classrooms have an increased ratio of teachers to students, meaning children benefit from more individual attention and skill development. Kristin Ink, current Partnership Program Special Education Teacher, explains that "we teach skills that are specific to each child and where they are in their development, and where they need to go."

Not only do the children in the Partnership Program learn from their teachers and classroom staff, but through playing and being social with their peers. One of the benefits of the integrated classroom model is that children learn so much from each other. For instance, when a child looks around the room and sees three kids sitting on the rug for circle time, they draw on the skills they've been working on with teachers and make the connection that they should join circle time as well. Imitation is one of the primary ways that all children learn, regardless of disability.

In addition to social and academic skills, teachers also provide a different kind of education to the students in the class. In an environment driven by learning through play and imitation, all of the children in the program go to kindergarten understanding that everyone learns differently, processes emotions differently, and communicates differently. Zonder says, "We turn out some of the most empathetic, community minded preschoolers you'll ever meet." They learn that people are different. They learn that some people communicate differently, and that some people walk differently. It teaches a lot of tolerance, and that there are so many different people in the world.

Over the last fifteen years, more than 154 children have been a part of Racker's Partnership Program. Not only has this program been a leading force in establishing classroom environments where each student is celebrated for their individuality, but it's helped to invite a welcome world of diversity where everyone learns and knows they belong, participate and thrive. 🌱





Racker Rivals BIG RED

presented by TOMPKINS Trust Company

We would like to thank everyone involved in making
Racker Rivals Big Red 2019 a success!

Team Cornell

Chris Axtell	Sean Flanagan	Joe Nieuwendyk
Cole Bardreau	Rich Ford	Pat Ouckama
Patrick Bohn	Tom Fox	Nick Price
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Team Racker

Chris Allinger	Jeremy Downs	Sean Schmidt
Anthony Angello	Greg Hartz	Lynnette Scofield
Dan Brown	Wayne Mahar	Jacob Scott
Dustin Brown	Mitch Major	Topher Scott
Jake Brown	David McNeil	Kent Scriber
Tom Corso	Rob Morgan	Ben Syer
Bill Curtis	AJ Prudence	Alex Tuch
Nick Dalrymple	Nick Rock	Tom Turck

Special Thanks To:

Mike Schafer, Cornell Men's Hockey Coach
Greg Hartz, President and CEO of Tompkins Trust Co.
Topher Scott, Racker Rivals Big Red Event Chair



RACKER RIVALS BIG RED
Over \$142,000 was raised to support children with disabilities in our community!

Thanks to our Top Tier Sponsors:

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Friends and Family Open Skate Sponsored by Cargill

Tioga Summer Program Receives \$3,500

For the past few summers, lucky students enrolled in our Tioga summer preschool classes have been able to participate in an enrichment program that has given them the opportunity to learn about art, dance, music, and more! This year, the program would not have been possible without the support of Visions Federal Credit Union.



Children from the Tioga summer preschool program enjoy watching Tiny, an Agrican Sulcata Tortoise from Rosie's zoo.

Thanks to an award of \$3,500 from Visions, the preschoolers had an action-packed summer that helped them work on their creativity, social skills, and movement. Gymnastics and yoga gave the students a great workout while allowing them to practice taking off their shoes and socializing with their peers and others in the community. Swimming taught them water safety and independence in getting dressed. Activities such as the Magic Paintbrush, Tom Knight – a singer and puppeteer, and Johnny Only – an entertainer with music and bubbles, helped the kids practice their listening skills and gave them a chance to get creative with painting and dancing. The students even got to learn about animals with Rosie's Zoo!

Thank you to Visions Federal Credit Union for making it possible for our Tioga students to enjoy and learn from all of these incredible activities!



Musician Johnny Only entertains Club Positive Daycare and OES Enrichment Students with bubbles, music, and more!

Upcoming Events

Ice Cream Social

9/21/19 - 1:00PM to 4:00PM
Stewart Park - Ithaca, NY
Large Pavilion

Racker is holding an Ice Cream Social at Stewart Park to celebrate long time relationships between Racker staff and the families we support. First 25 to register will get a T-Shirt.

This event is free and RSVPs can be made to Jennifer Frank as soon as possible at jenniferf@racker.org or at 607-272-5891 ext.500

Partnership Program 15th Anniversary Party

9/27/19 - 2:30PM to 4:00PM
Wilkins Small Learning Center - Racker
3226 Wilkins Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850

Karen Fried, former Director of Autism Services at Racker and influential partner in forming The Partnership Program, returns to visit Racker and celebrate 15 years of this groundbreaking program. Dr. Karen Fried is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and Psychologist who has worked with children with disabilities for close to 30 years.

Please register online by September 20th at www.racker.org/events

For more information, please contact Annmarie DiGiorgio by e-mail at annmaried@racker.org or by phone at 607-272-5891 ext. 285

Tompkins Community Celebration

10/10/19 - 8:30AM to 10:30AM
Emerson Suites - Ithaca College
953 Danby Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850

Please join us for the Tompkins Community Celebration as we recognize staff and community members for their dedication and commitment to a world where all people know they belong.

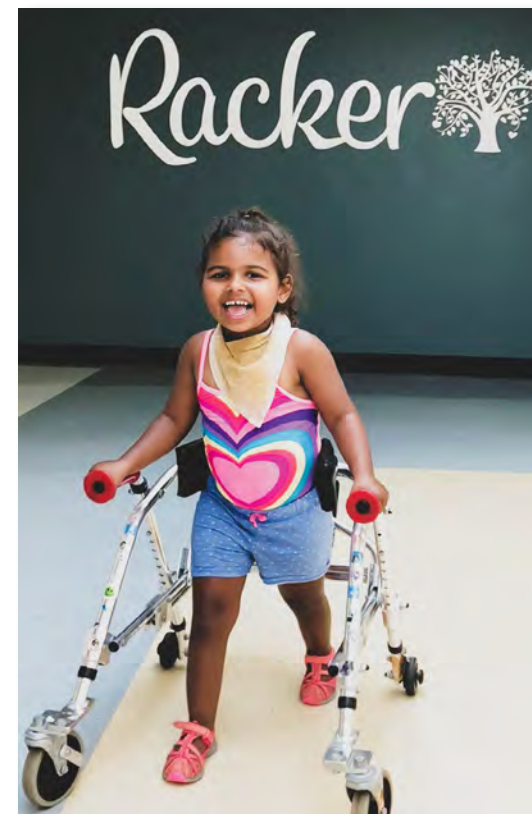
Please register online by October 3rd at www.racker.org/events/tompkins-county-community-celebration

Cost is \$25 for community members and \$12 for staff members. The celebration is free for Racker participants and any accompanying staff member.

For more information, please contact Annmarie DiGiorgio by e-mail at annmaried@racker.org or by phone at 607-272-5891 ext. 285

YOUR PLANNED GIFT TODAY HELPS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO WILL NEED US TOMORROW...

Our funding streams can be inadequate and unreliable. But the families we serve need to know they can depend on Racker to be there for them and their loved one when they need us – now and in the future.



That is why planned gifts are so important. They help fill in where the funding falls short. They enable us to address the big issues that our funding doesn't cover. They ensure ongoing financial stability, so that families who will need us in the years ahead will find us ready and able to help.

A planned gift is a provision made in your estate plans. It can be as simple as leaving a bequest for Racker, or listing Racker as a beneficiary on life insurance or a retirement fund. When you put this provision in place, you are expressing your commitment to Racker and the work we do for our community, and for that we thank you!

We are happy to get together and discuss what kind of legacy gift would be best for you and your family.

For more information, please call: Perri LoPinto at 607.272.5891 x 234

Have you already made a planned gift? We would be honored if you would let us know!



MAKING IT HAPPEN

A BUGGY EXPERIENCE!

Racker Preschool staff member Collin Clary recently brought a large selection of bugs to the Margaret Gibson Preschool for the children to enjoy and experience.



The Partnership Program enjoying a selection of bugs.

Collin's collection includes over 40 critters, many of which he brought to the preschool. The students were able to interact with a scorpion, tarantula, and cockroaches.

Thank you Collin for making this special experience happen for the students!

NATIONAL DSP WEEK STARTS SEPTEMBER 8TH

National Direct Support and Community Support Professional week is September 8th through September 14th! There are nearly 100,000 DSPs that work for non-for-profit agencies in New York State alone. The community of Direct Support Professionals supports individuals with disabilities and their families 24/7/365. If you see a current or former DSP, please help us in celebrating the very important work they have done! Thank you to the thousands of dedicated professionals that provide an incredible service to so many.



Thank You!

FALL 2019

OUTLOOK

Racker
3226 Wilkins Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

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Ethan Carlson is a student at Ithaca High School. As an individual on the autism spectrum, Ethan sees the world a bit differently than most people. 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 high school's magazine: *IHS Tattler*.

Thank you Ethan for sharing your excellent cartoons with us!

EDITOR Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations and Development

DESIGN Joshua Skellett, Creative Content Strategist

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