

OUTLOOK

Supporting People with Disabilities



Friends of Racker Luncheon gathers nearly 100 friends in support of our Early Childhood Services

Marco, accompanied by his Special Education Teacher Mary Hause, speaks to the audience during the luncheon about one of his favorite things, praying mantises!



Over 100 friends of Racker gathered at the Tompkins County preschool for a Friends of Racker luncheon on July 13th. Braving the wind and rain that has been such a familiar sight this summer, these loyal friends had the opportunity to bid on artwork at the silent auction and hear about our Early Childhood programs and how they can continue to support Racker's services.

Cris Donovan, Associate Executive Director, provided an overview of preschool, itinerant services and clinical therapies. Our dear friend Topher Scott, Racker Rivals Big Red Chair, shared his experience and why volunteering his time to help support Racker has been so important to him and his family over the years. Laura Riker, now a staff member at Racker, and her son Marco (aka Super Mom and Super Kid) shared their personal experience as service recipients of Racker. Marco has autism and has a sensory processing disorder. He attended the Tompkins County preschool for two years, where he flourished. During his time in preschool Marco went from being non-verbal to talking up a storm. Through the therapies he received in the integrated preschool setting, combined with the team approach between his family and Racker Centers, Marco was able to sit in front of 100 people at this luncheon and tell them about his favorite things- praying mantises, getting to come to school at Racker, and his best friend. His ability to develop friendships with peers in an inclusive setting is truly at the heart of what Racker represents, and Marco's story is one example of the need to support the work done here at Racker.

The luncheon was one of many smaller initiatives to fundraise in place of the Racker Rivals Big Red hockey event this year. Racker is taking a one year hiatus from the event while Cornell addresses updates to Lynah Rink.

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A NOTE FROM DAN

For a decade, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) has been saying that we are going to transition to managed care for the individuals that we support. OPWDD is only now taking some concrete steps in that direction. In early July OPWDD began the process to form Care Coordination Organizations (CCOs), I know, another acronym.

The purpose of the CCOs is to provide care management services, which means coordinating the healthcare and long-term supports and services for people with disabilities. These services are similar to the supports that Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs) currently provide. Here is the timeline that OPWDD intends to follow:



July 1, 2018 - CCOs will be up and operating.

At this time, individuals with disabilities and their families will have three choices:

1. Keep Racker for Service Coordination
2. Change from Racker to a Care Coordinator Organization where a Racker MSC staff person provides the Care Coordination
3. Change from Racker to a Care Coordination Organization and have a different person provide Care Coordination

It is confusing, but the key point is you have choices.

July 1, 2019 - Nonprofits like Racker will no longer provide care coordination services. All those services will be provided by a CCO. Families will have to choose a CCO, or one will be chosen for them. OPWDD hopes to have at least two CCOs per region to choose from in all areas of the State.

What does this mean for the person with a disability and their family? Between now and June 30, 2019 they may have periods where they don't have a MSC (MSCs may leave for other opportunities because of the anxiety that this change is producing). MSCs are anxious about this change because of the impact on the people they support and the possibility that they won't have a job (CCOs don't have to hire existing MSCs). This could create a situation where they aren't able to access needed supports and services.

OPWDD firmly believes that getting to managed care will be better for individuals with disabilities and their families, but the current transition plan that OPWDD has for MSC transition to CCOs could be painful. Racker is doing everything possible to make sure that families and our MSC staff survive this transition and "land on their feet" in the new CCO world.

What can you do? Stay informed and comment on the documents and processes proposed by OPWDD. Myself and other Executive Directors have regular conversations with OPWDD about the transition to managed care, but your voice will be instrumental in making sure that managed care carries forward OPWDD's goal of person-centered planning. You can find links on the OPWDD website. Together we can make this transition to managed care a success.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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CRIS DONOVAN NAMED ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Racker is very excited to announce that Cris Donovan has been promoted to Associate Executive Director. Cris has been part of Racker for nineteen years.

In 1998, she started as a Team Director in the residential program, was promoted to Assistant Director of Residential, and then Home Services Director. In 2006 she took on the position of Director of Community Support Services overseeing both Service Coordination and the Family Resource Program. The following year, Cris received her Master's in Public Administration from Binghamton University. Most recently, Cris took on leadership of the Early Childhood programs, including Clinical Services, Special Education Services, and Child Care as our Director of Early Childhood and Community Services.

Cris is adept in strategic planning, leadership development, management of day-to-day operations and person-centered planning ideas. She is a bright and knowledgeable resource for staff, the families that Racker serves, and our community partners. Over her career at Racker, Cris has helped programs grow where needs presented themselves, always keeping the needs of families and our Mission at the center of the work, and at the same time improving the financial sustainability of the programs.

Her experience managing itinerant/community based services, managing site-based programs (from her time in our Residential program), and her consistent push to have Racker be on the forefront of how we support people with disabilities and their families, make her the ideal person for the Associate Executive Director role.

Please join us in congratulating Cris in her new role.



SAVE THE DATE! TOMPKINS COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Thursday, October 12, 2017

8:30-10:30 a.m. at Ithaca College's Emerson Suites

Join us for our annual Tompkins Celebration where we honor staff and community award recipients for their dedication and commitment to the mission and vision of Racker Centers.

Tickets are \$25/pp and registration will be available online in early September.

Friends of Racker Luncheon continued from cover...

A fun and educational event, the luncheon helps to fill the gap of unfunded services and bring many who care about the important work of Racker together.

Thank you to the following artists who donated their pieces to the silent auction: Rob Mackenzie, Terry Plater, Lisa Nymack, Anita Malina, Efraim Racker (courtesy of the Costello family), Daniel McPheeters, Nancy Malina, Perri LoPinto, and Adam Delli-Bovi. Also, special thanks to our guest speakers and all those who attended our event and helped to make it such a success!

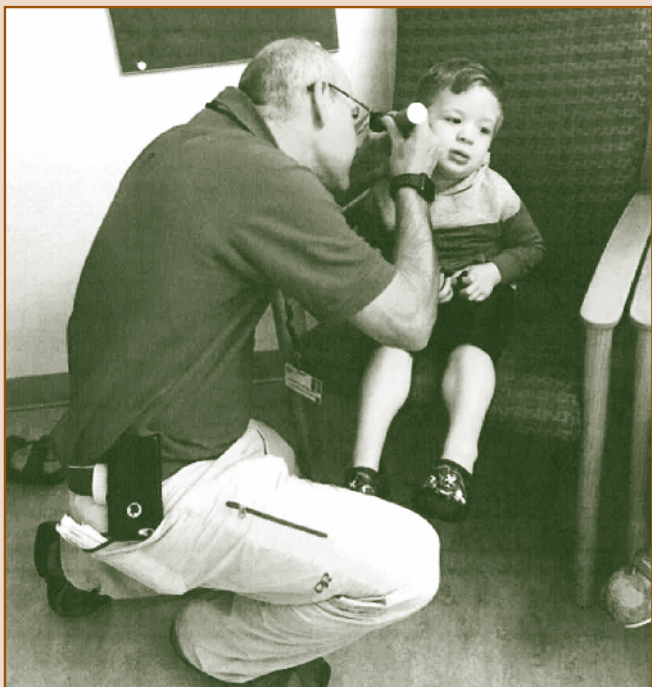


Silent Art Auction at Friends of Racker Luncheon

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH HELPS CHILDREN WITH CLEFT PALATES FOR OVER 20 YEARS *by Perri LoPinto*

I arrived at promptly 8:00 a.m. to the Howell Education Center at Cayuga Medical Center to find the room already filled with doctors and practitioners of the Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Team and Clinic. Around the table I was introduced to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, dentists, an orthodontist, a pediatrician, an ENT (ear, nose and throat), and a plastic surgeon. Also present was a speech therapist, an occupational therapist, and a social worker. As folks grabbed a cup of coffee and settled into their seats, folders were passed out by the Clinic Administrator Marisa Foehr, Ph.D., R.N. The feeling in the room was warm and familiar. This team had worked together before.

Started over 20 years ago by Dr. Jeffrey Lewis, from Cayuga Facial Surgery, the Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Team and Clinic serves children of all ages and their families, helping them navigate through multiple surgeries, therapies, and the ongoing issues that arise when your child is born with a cleft lip and/or palate. Dr. Lewis, the Clinic and Team Director, moved back to his hometown of Ithaca in 1994 after living and working as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in California. Upon setting up his practice, he found a gap in the coordination of services that were critical after a child had surgery to begin correcting cleft lips and/or palates. All of the services were available in our area, but there wasn't a coordinated way for families to receive that information and support ongoing. So his first stop was to Cayuga Medical Center, where Bonnie Howell quickly agreed to make space available in the hospital. Then he recruited the doctors and practitioners for the team, explaining the importance and asking them to volunteer their time. They all quickly agreed. In 1996, the Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Team and Clinic became a reality.



Dr. Strominger examines a patient.

WHAT IS A CLEFT LIP OR PALATE?

A cleft lip is a split or opening in the upper lip. It is usually on one side or the other, and can extend up to the nose. It can affect the formation of the gums, and thus the development of teeth. Of the babies born with a cleft lip, approximately half will also have a cleft palate. This is a gap in the roof of the mouth along the midline. Cleft lips and palates affect how families can nourish their child and present ongoing speech challenges that can continue even after all the surgeries are complete. Approximately 11 children are born each year in our region that have a cleft lip and/or palate.

From 8:00 – 8:30 a.m., Marisa briefed the team on the patients they would be seeing this morning. Ranging in ages from 2 weeks old to 12 years of age, the children they would see had a wide range of issues that would be addressed. Some of the children had been to the clinic many times before, and for some it would be their first time. But what most of them had in common was a cleft lip and/or palate that required surgeries and then ongoing therapies to address feeding and speech development. Most cleft lip and/or palates are completely fixable. It's just a long road that can take 7 – 10 surgeries over many years. The Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Team and Clinic meet twice a year to supplement ongoing medical care with a multi-disciplinary approach, helping and supporting children and families throughout their entire medical and emotional journey.

At 8:30 a.m. the PowerPoint was completed, questions were answered and team members paired up into their predetermined pairs. Families and kids had arrived and were waiting in assigned rooms in the pediatric wing of Cayuga Medical Center. The team then rotated through the rooms, seeing the families and their kids, addressing their particular expertise, answering questions, making suggestions, and then out and on to the next room and the next family. From 8:30 – 10:30 that morning, 6 teams would cycle through seeing 8 families.

For this morning's clinic I shadowed Sheryl Edwards, a Speech Language Pathologist that works at Racker Centers, and Dr. Strominger, a locally practicing ENT. (Also on the clinic team from Racker Centers are Leslie Byron a child psychologist and Sue Raymond, an occupational therapist.) Our first room took us to see a young girl about 5 years old. Sheryl has been a part of the Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Team since its inception. Knowing Sheryl as a skilled expert in speech language pathology and feeding therapy, I was still impressed to see how deftly she interacted with the children, how she gently put them at ease, and how quickly her trained ear zeroed in. Sheryl's goal is to get the kid talking. She needs to hear them articulate sounds/speech. She is listening closely with many years of experience. This young girl had already undergone a number of operations. Sheryl is quickly trying to assess what is working well, and what needs to be adjusted. The little girl was shy. Sheryl pulled out some stickers and began to ask engaging questions. That did the

Continued on next page...

Thank you to our Business Partners who have stepped forward to help support our Community Celebrations and ongoing services:

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CLEFT PALATES *Continued from previous page...*

trick. Stickers are fun to talk about. While Sheryl engaged the child, Dr. Strominger chatted with the parents. What were their concerns? How were things going? He multi-tasked as he spoke with them, answering their questions, examining the little girl (after she had her stickers) and setting up follow-up appointments from his phone. Technology was a beautiful thing as I realized that he was viewing charts and information to help him address the issues at hand.

We were in the room about 15 minutes. We cycled out, another duo cycled in. I think it was the social worker and the occupational therapist. Throughout the morning we saw 8 children. The range of issues discussed was wide and varied. One little girl was having balance issues – another little boy seemed delayed in his speech progress. One older child was struggling with the emotions that come from having this type of surgery, and a newborn baby's parents were beginning the process of what it means to have a child born with a cleft palate. It was quite an eye-opener to realize how much these families had to deal with and how much might still be ahead for them.

We ended the morning back in the Howell conference room. Back up on the screen each child's face appeared as the doctors and practitioners took turns sharing their observations and insights. Often group discussion ensued – Was there a different way to address this? Were they missing anything? How was the family coping? Was there regression since last time they saw the child? Marisa took her own notes and then collected their booklets. Together, she and Dr. Lewis would generate the report for the families and for the appropriate health care providers. As I sat for a moment and pondered what I had just been privileged to witness, the importance of the clinic came sharply into focus. How difficult would it be for these parents to have to try and coordinate all of this information on their own? All I kept thinking was this is how health care is supposed to be. The patient at the center of coordinated information. All their doctors sharing and working together to get to the best possible outcome for the child. I was so impressed. What a wonderful collaboration for the children of our community.



Sheryl Edwards, a Racker Speech Language Pathologist, gets a hug from Ellie. Ellie receives services through Racker and the Cleft Palate and Facial Deformities Clinic.

OCM STUDENTS FORM GO GREEN AMBASSADORS

In February, Onondaga, Cortland, Madison (OCM) BOCES launched its first competition to see which of nine buildings could truly “go green” and make the biggest improvements in recycling, conserving energy and reducing trash.

That’s when Angela Panetta stepped in. Panetta, a high school junior, became a “Go Green ambassador” at the McEvoy Education Center of OCM BOCES, a task that involved daily monitoring of the recycling and trash receptacles during lunch. Panetta answered non-stop questions from students about what to throw out and what to recycle. She wore orange gloves to grab the occasional recyclable that fell in the trash, and vice versa. Eventually, students asked fewer and fewer questions.

“It became more effective if they started to figure it out for themselves,” Panetta said. In the end, Panetta received a building-wide “Go Green” award during a recognition ceremony held at the end of the 2016-17 school year. It was especially significant because the entire McEvoy building near Cortland won the larger Go Green challenge at OCM BOCES, edging out its nearest competitor—the operations/maintenance building in Syracuse—by 14 points.

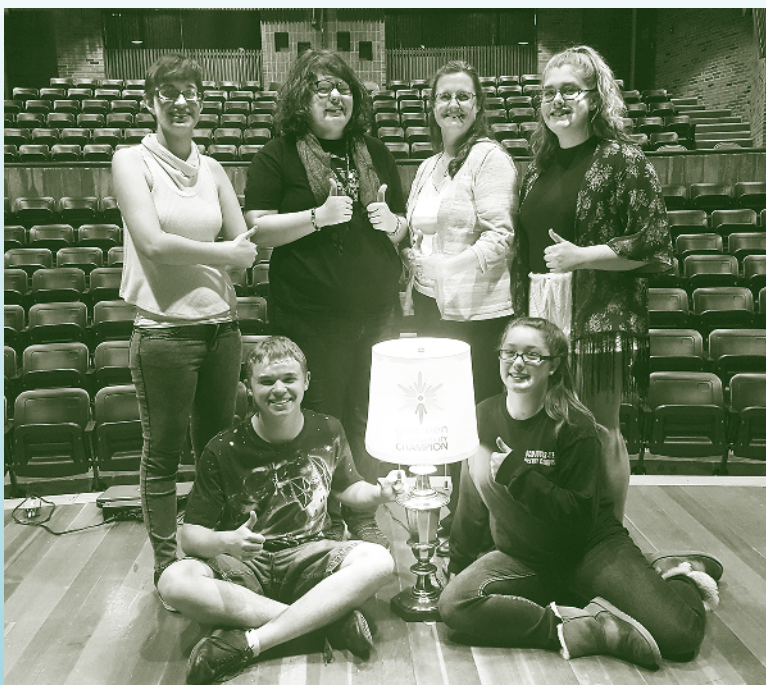
As a result, students and staff at McEvoy received a free pizza party and the first-ever “Go Green” championship lamp. It is now on display in the school. It has bright green, energy-efficient light bulbs.

Teacher Renee Mitchell-Compton, McEvoy’s Go Green building leader, said she was “very proud and pleased” with everyone’s hard work. “I think we’ve made a lot of progress,” she said, “but there’s still progress to be had.”

Mitchell-Compton presented the Go Green award to Panetta, who worked on a children’s book about recycling as part of a class project as well as the lunchroom education initiative. Several other sustainability projects were launched at the school, including art projects and a composting effort.



Angela with her Go Green Award



Students and staff vowed to hang onto the trophy next school year, when a new challenge will begin. Special Education Principal Carole Anne Davies was especially proud of the victory—and the Go Green lamp. She challenged the students asking “We don’t want to let this go somewhere else next year, do we?”

OCM and Tompkins, Seneca, Tioga (TST) BOCES and Racker have partnered to support students with social/emotional and behavioral challenges for the last 29 years. Angela Panetta is a high school student enrolled in the Counseling for School Success partner program.

Pictured left: Go Green ambassadors at McEvoy pose near their championship lamp. In front are Kyle Ryan of Homer and Savannah Contento of Cortland. In back are G Torres of Homer, Angela Panetta of North Syracuse, teacher Renee Mitchell-Compton and Jackie Fitch of Homer.

This article was first published by OCM BOCES and shared with their permission.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Social Emotional Curriculum Funded Through Legacy Foundation

In 1988 the mental health day treatment program was established in conjunction with TST BOCES and since then Racker Centers' mental health professionals have also developed various other unique supports and partnerships to help area students and their families. In 2004 the Lighthouse Program was established to serve middle and high school students who experience emotional challenges that impact their school success. With increasing district support and participation, the Lighthouse Program has grown and expanded to serve more students over the years. In light of the success of the Lighthouse Program, in 2014, a number of TST BOCES districts requested that we develop a sister program for elementary school students. In 2015 The Little Lighthouse Program was founded and has supported a diverse population of students and families from 6 different school districts to date. Little Lighthouse is housed on the TST BOCES campus on Warren Rd in Ithaca, NY. This year, through support from The Legacy Foundation of Tompkins County, a grant has helped to fund the development of new Social Emotional Curriculum for Little Lighthouse. Thank you to The Legacy Foundation for this important investment in our area youth.



Triad Funds Learning Management System

A Learning Management system will enable Racker to implement a training infrastructure that will enable staff to complete trainings online and proactively offer more standard trainings agency-wide, ensuring staff stay up to date on regulatory requirements and best practices in the field. This allows us to better serve the individuals Racker supports. Additionally,



TRIAD FOUNDATION

a system such as this will allow us to expand offerings we are currently training staff on internally, to more local organizations and regional state employees who are also required to maintain the same credentials. The implementation of the system has been made possible by the generous support of the Triad Foundation. Thank you!!

Thank You for Supporting Preschool Enrichment Programs!

Enrichment programs for our preschool classrooms offer the opportunity to introduce art, music, theatre, nature, and literature to children with disabilities, who may otherwise not have the opportunity to experience these cultural learning experiences with their friends out in the community. This year we were fortunate to have support for enrichment experiences at all three of our preschool sites and extend those experiences to our Child Care program and children attending Head Start.

The Floyd Hooker Foundation once again supported our Tioga County classrooms summer programs, located at the Owego Elementary School. The students had multiple musical guests, such as John Simon and Joanne Grey, and even Tom Knight the puppeteer visited. The students also spent time in the community at Ice Cream Works and the pool. Thank you for the Floyd Hooker Foundation for your wonderful support!

**Floyd
Hooker
Foundation**



A preschooler, with Special Education Teacher Jaye Hale, enjoys the music of Nate and Kate at the Cortland County Preschool Site.

The children at our Tompkins County site enjoyed enrichment programs courtesy of the **Community Foundation of Tompkins County through the Helen T. Howland Foundation Fund**. A visit from the Sciencenter with their Portable Planetarium gave the kids a chance to see the night sky in the middle of the day! The Nate and Kate Show and Magic Paintbrush also visited the preschool. At the end of August an adaptive PE day will get kids of all abilities outside for some fun activities. Thank you to the Community Foundation of Tompkins County for your support of these programs that allow our students to have experiences that let them learn and grow.



A big thank you to the **Lewis G. Schaeneman Jr. Foundation** for their support of enrichment programs at our Cortland County location. Their generosity allowed the students to experience the fun of art through Mouse Paint, to sing along with Nate and Kate and to learn the science of bubbles with the Bubbleman. All of these experiences give children with disabilities an opportunity to learn and have fun alongside friends in a safe and positive environment.

FALL 2017

OUTLOOK

www.rackercenters.org

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STAFF HONORED BY SOUTHERN TIER INDEPENDENCE CENTER



Staff member Laura Riker, Resource Network Senior Family Support Fiscal Coordinator, was recently honored at the Southern Tier Independence Center (STIC) 2017 Recognition Luncheon and Annual Meeting. STIC recognizes individuals that have made extraordinary contributions to STIC and/or the disability community at this event. They honored Laura for her outstanding involvement and help in allowing STIC be more successful in their day-to-day activities and advocacy efforts.

Congratulations Laura!

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