

OUTLOOK



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

KEEPING THE FOCUS

Dan Brown navigates the role of the new Executive Director of Franziska Racker Centers as the agency celebrates 65 years of serving our community. Roger Sibley, now Emeritus Executive Director, retired at the end of December 2012 after 33 years at the helm.

Dan is pleased to accept the position as Roger's successor after having worked with him for over a decade. He has a long history with the agency, and the search committee knew that along with his many strengths and years of experience, having an internal candidate to step in would make the transition process much smoother for staff and those who are served by the agency. And it has.

Sitting down just one week into the position, Dan comments, "Someone coming into this position from outside of this field or even outside of this agency would have a steep learning curve, making this transition more difficult. I have been able to begin discussions with staff on a strategic planning level already, benefiting from great working relationships we have in place. I'm lucky that I get to dive right in since those sturdy foundations already exist."

Looking towards the future of Franziska Racker Centers, Dan's first and foremost goal: "Keeping the focus on the people that need our help." He states, "I hold dear many 'Rogerisms' from my years of working with him, one of which is, 'we co-op government money to do the right thing for the people we serve'." He continues, "It is not unique that we continue to face changes and hurdles, and the coming years will be no exception, but we need to keep asking the questions, 'How can we advance our mission and vision in the new environment?,' 'How can we remove barriers to participation in our community?,' and 'How do we advocate for changes that help individuals achieve their goals?'"

In fact, advocacy is one of the main areas Dan will be focusing on, and he feels strongly it will be one of the major strategic issues the agency addresses. Dan states, "We were started by families who were advocating

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Dan Brown appears here (far right) with his family on a trip in 2010. Each of Dan and his wife Eve's children chose a place to travel to after graduating from college. Eldest daughter Katie (center) chose Machu Picchu and smiles here along with her brother Matt (back) and younger sister, Hannah (far left).

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for their children; we are here because of them. As regulatory and financial stresses on the service system increase, we need to make sure we are always keeping our focus on the people we are serving and their goals.”

Other issues that will be addressed in the strategic planning process include: Franziska Racker Centers’ work as it relates to the change to a managed care model, exploring ways to develop more natural supports for the individuals served, implementing ways to promote a healthier lifestyle for those the agency serves, and developing more links across the agency’s programs relative to work with individuals with behavioral

issues. Dan states, “We are seeing a growing population of individuals with behavioral issues throughout our society and more individuals who are looking to us for support in this area. We have highly trained staff members that conduct educational seminars at the national level relating to early childhood behavioral issues. I want to explore more ways to utilize what is working so successfully in one program and share that expertise across programs. This is an important part of our new Learning Initiative which addresses the overarching goal to promote understanding of human development, social systems, and the effects of disability. We want to be the catalyst for information exchange and sharing best practices on helping individuals with disabilities.”

Dan was first asked to join the Board of Directors of Franziska Racker Centers (then The Special Children’s Center), by colleague and friend Dave Palmer. It was late 1994 when Dan met with Dave at the Royal Court restaurant and was first introduced to the agency. Having lived in this area since receiving his MBA from the Johnson School of Management at Cornell University, Dan felt it was ironic that he was not more familiar with an organization that could have been such a huge help to his family, when they themselves were looking for support for their youngest daughter. Hannah, then age 5, could have benefited greatly from the services provided by Racker Centers. He states, “We were tossed into a confusing system and like many others struggled to find the right assistance for our daughter. I wish we had been aware of The Special Children’s Center.” After that meeting, Dan joined the Board in 1995, quickly transitioned to Treasurer and then served as President of the Board from 1998-1999. It was during his term as President that the name changed from The Special Children’s Center to Franziska Racker Centers, both to honor the memory of Dr. Franziska Racker and to allow the organization to shed the misconception that it only served children – the agency serves individuals of all ages. When Roger approached Dan about joining Franziska Racker Centers as the Director of Finance, he knew his path in life had brought him here for a reason, and based on the experiences his family faced raising a child with a developmental disability and his commitment to community involvement, he was eager to accept the position within such a community focused organization. As Roger stated to staff when the search committees’ decision was finalized for Dan to become the next Executive Director, “Dan has been deeply involved in every aspect of this organization for many years, and I know he will build on our successes.”

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WELCOME OUR NEW 2013 BOARD MEMBERS

ANGELO MASTRONARDI

Angelo joins the Board of Directors after more than a 40-year relationship with Franziska Racker Centers, beginning when his daughter Tracey was diagnosed with a developmental disability. His family has developed wonderful relationships with staff at the agency over these years. Mr. Mastronardi retired from the NYS Police in 1999, was asked by Troopers to come back to work after the 9/11/01 terrorist attack, and he served another two years prior to his retirement in 2003. He currently also serves on the Board of the J.M. Murray Center in Cortland, NY and his daughter resides at a Franziska Racker Centers' residential home.



PAUL BANFIELD

Paul has been a lifelong banker in Tompkins County and currently serves as Senior Vice President in the Commercial Services Department at Tompkins Trust Company. A graduate of Ithaca College, he resides in Cayuga Heights with his wife Diane. The Banfields' first became involved with Franziska Racker Centers when looking for support for their three adopted children with special needs. The family has benefited from Respite Services and their son is a graduate of the Turning Point program at TST BOCES. In addition to serving on Franziska Racker Centers' Board of Directors, Paul is a Board member at Hospicare Foundation and is also affiliated with Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, The Learning Web and Ithaca Sunrise Rotary.

KRISTIN LEWIS

After receiving her bachelor's degree from Immaculata University and her M.B.A. from Drexel University, Kristin spent several years working in marketing research at corporations such as Warner Amex and American Business Information. Transitioning to the healthcare field, she worked at San Jose Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Associates. The Lewis' then moved back to the Ithaca area, hometown to her husband Jeffrey Lewis, M.D., also a Racker Centers volunteer as a past Board member and current Associate Director. Kristin feels her role as a mother, as well as her years of working with children in her job at Cayuga Facial Surgery where she serves as Administrative, Marketing and Financial Manager, have provided her with insight into the field of disabilities and advocacy as it relates to the disability movement, and is eager to support the Mission of Franziska Racker Centers.



DR. DAVID ROBERTSHAW

Dr Robertshaw obtained both his veterinary degree and his PhD in physiology from Glasgow University, UK. As a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, he then conducted research in Kenya before becoming the inaugural Chair of Physiology at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Nairobi. Upon moving to the U.S., he undertook a position at Indiana University School of Medicine which was followed by appointments at Colorado State University College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, and Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. In 2001, when a branch campus of Weill Cornell Medical College was established in Qatar, he became the founding Associate Dean for Premedical Education, retiring from there in 2008. He was appointed as a Fulbright Specialist in 2011 and assigned to work on curriculum development with the new Nazareth Academic Institute in Israel, which will serve the tertiary education needs of the local and primarily Arabic community. He feels strongly about the importance of quality education for medically and physically handicapped children which is what attracted Dr Robertshaw to become involved with Franziska Racker Centers.

CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH



The Collaborative Solutions Network (CSN) is our region's approach to supporting children and youth with mental health challenges and their families. Coordinated through Franziska Racker Centers by staff members, Jaydn McCune, LCSW and Sally Manning, M.S., this new initiative is bringing together individuals, schools, human service agencies, communities and other working groups to combine resources, finding ways to support youth facing mental health challenges.

"We are all being called to do more with less. The goal of the program is to increase the effectiveness of existing resources, making it easier for families to navigate and find the help they need when they need it most," states Jaydn McCune, CSN Director.

Prior to building a network such as this within our community, the experience for so many families has been a sad and vicious circle. One mother states, "It shouldn't be so difficult to uncover the help, and access programs in our community for mental health needs. At a time when connections and support were critical for our family, we felt isolated. We were working with many well meaning, highly educated professionals, but there wasn't a central place to access resources, especially those that support positive changes within the home." She continues, "We often wished for a 'one-stop-shop' where we could find out about resources and have a conversation with someone who understood and could connect us with the most appropriate assistance." This is exactly the role of the Collaborative Solutions Network.

Jaydn states, "Right now we are working with a family whose son is returning to our community after leaving a residential treatment facility. Thanks to the new initiatives of the Collaborative Solutions Network, a team has already been meeting to put a behavioral plan together and to organize school placement for him. All of this has happened before he has even returned home. Jaydn continues, "We are helping another family who came to us because their child was in severe crisis. Until now, they've been passed from program to program. Our belief within the Collaborative Solutions Network is, 'These are all our children. There should be no wrong door.' Now, due to the CSN, this family will receive needed services for their son because the right people are sitting around the table and are able to get systems to work together."

The initiatives that make up the CSN include:

1. **Whole Child Check up Initiative** - Whole Child Check Up encourages the integration of mental wellness screenings when families take children in for their primary doctor's visits. The screening is just another part of a wellness exam and is done through the completion of a simple checklist called the Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC), either filled out by the adult, or by the youth if they are of age. The goal is to identify mental health challenges early and to connect families with adequate resources.
2. **Solutions for Youth and Families Warm Line** - The Warm Line is a resource specifically to help individuals and families find mental health supports in their community. Warm Line staff can help you find the most appropriate care. Call 607.274.6302, if someone is not available, leave a message and your call will be returned ASAP!
3. **Collaborative Care Community Model** - This model was developed by over 160 regional providers, youth and families, and is a best practice for supporting youth who are transitioning to and from hospitals or residential care. The Collaborative Care Community model works to increase positive collaboration, decrease setbacks and days missed from school.

Jaydn continues, "The Collaborative Solutions Network is really trying to take an all encompassing approach to helping youth within our community at any and all stages of facing a mental health challenge. Early detection is so important, which is why we are focusing on working with local pediatricians to implement the Whole Child Check Up Initiative.

The key is early treatment which often makes it easier for individuals to learn more positive approaches to managing their health and wellness throughout their lives. We need to de-stigmatize the idea of mental illness, and get our community to address this topic. We want people to understand how prevalent mental health challenges are in our society and that it is ok to ask for help."

To learn more about who is involved with the Collaborative Solutions Network and for more information on resources in your area visit www.mentalhealthconnect.org



EARTH AND SUN: GOING GREEN INITIATIVES

EARTH

Franziska Racker Centers is going greener with a number of important initiatives. Having been a ReBusiness partner with Tompkins County (TC) Recycling and Solid Waste for several years now, Jim Schafrik, Custodial Supervisor and Robb Stone, the Tompkins County Preschool Chef, have talked about ways to continue to reduce waste at the Wilkins Road location. Upon moving back into the renovated campus last summer, they were as eager as ever to investigate options. Working together, along with the help of TC Recycling and Solid Waste and Cayuga Compost, they were able to implement a program to reduce waste by becoming an official member of Cayuga Compost's Green Plate Club!

"We currently compost all brown and white paper towels used in bathrooms, kitchen areas and the seven classrooms throughout the building. Additionally, there are food compost bins in all kitchen areas for food scraps," states Jim. "I am already down to one small

bag of garbage a day from the previous 32 gallon container of garbage that was produced from lunch service for the classrooms before," states Robb Stone.

The Tompkins County Solid Waste Management Division pays for half of the fee for ReBusiness partners to compost, according to the Division's Communications and Administrative Coordinator Geoff Dunn. Dunn states, "This program is saving organizations money and doing something good for the environment."

"Recycling is free, and composting is

SINCE THE PROGRAM STARTED IN 2012, WE'VE HAD 5.2 TONS OF TRASH, 7.15 TONS OF RECYCLED MATERIAL, AND ¾ TON OF COMPOST!

very inexpensive," states Jim Schafrik, "We continue to try and take small steps to find ways to reduce waste, while avoiding a large impact to staff. For instance, we encourage staff to try to refrain from bringing un-



Jim Schafrik points out the composting bins throughout the kitchen areas.

compostable garbage into the facility. Our goal is to use Wilkins Road as a test site, and then expand this program to all of our agency locations throughout all three counties."

SUN

In addition to the new composting program, Franziska Racker Centers is also going solar. Last year, through a grant received by the Department of Energy under the Sustainable Energy Resources for Consumers (SERC) grant, thermal solar panels were installed by Tompkins Community Action at six of Racker Centers' residential houses for domestic hot water production. Now, Rick Darfler, Director of Facilities, is excited about the energy savings as a result of solar photovoltaic panels which have also been installed on the administrative building at the Wilkins Road site. This project, made possible by a grant through NYSERDA, involved the installation of 116 photovoltaic panels which generate 210 DC watts of power and in total supply the building with an estimated 25,600 kilowatt hours of electricity per year. Franziska Racker Centers has been recognized two years in a row by Sustainable

Tompkins as offering a "Sign of Sustainability" which identifies and honors individuals and organizations that are doing their part to advance community sustainability. These initiatives have been rewarding for Rick, who takes the responsibility of energy conservation very seriously. "Every little bit helps. In addition to the composting and solar energy, we've been able to put to use additional NYSERDA funding to replace all wall lighting packs with LED wall packs that use a fraction of the energy at our Tompkins County and Cortland preschool sites," states Rick, "and now two houses within the agency's residential program, one in Ithaca and one in Cortland, are certified Energy Star Qualified and have earned a Silver Level rating by the NAHB on the National Group Building Standard scale."



Rick Darfler with the solar panels before installation.

SPOTLIGHTS

PUZZLE SOLVERS

Kimberly McRae Friedman and Nicki Wynn are both mothers of a child with autism. Both of their children attended Franziska Racker Centers' Partnership Program in Cortland County, and both women have a passion for raising funds and awareness about autism. In 2009 Kimberly and Nicki, along with close friend Jackie Newton, decided to focus these fundraising efforts on a local level. In the past the trio had worked to raise money for larger national organizations such as Autism Speaks and, though these larger organizations are valuable and important, Kimberly says they wanted to make an impact closer to home. "We knew there were families right here within our own community who needed help. We made a conscious decision to change our focus and make it so we were helping people on a local level," she explains. The result is Puzzle Solvers, a not-for-profit organization that is committed to supporting family members and individuals whose lives are affected by autism.

Puzzle Solvers' mission is to provide resources, increase awareness, and raise funds for families and individuals impacted by autism spectrum disorder and enhance their quality of life. "We pride ourselves on neighbors taking care of neighbors, community members taking care of community members," states Kim, "and all of the funds raised have come from the Cortland area and are used for residents and local organizations." Franziska Racker Centers received a donation of \$2000 from Puzzle Solvers to be used specifically for the Cortland Partnership Program. Nicki and Kimberly's children graduated from the program in 2010 and 2011 respectively. The program had such a positive impact on Kimberly and Nicki's families that the group decided to support the program.

Puzzle Solvers is able to support requests for assistance through the generous support of community members and from local fundraising events, such as

the Annual Puzzle Solvers Golf Outing held each September. To date, Puzzle Solvers has raised nearly \$10,000 to support research, treatment, education, individuals and families. The dispersion of funds raised is based largely on funding requests submitted by an individual, a family member on behalf of an individual, or by a service coordinator on behalf of a family/individual. Currently, requests are restricted to Cortland County residents and have included requests for items such as communication devices or adaptive toys, funds for therapies, or reimbursement of travel expenses to doctor appointments etc. If you know of a family in need, or you would like more information on supporting Puzzle Solvers, please visit www.puzzlesolvers.org or call 607-543-0953.

PUZZLE SOLVERS AND FRANZISKA RACKER CENTERS' PARENT NETWORK *presents*



Family Fun Day **for friends and families with children on the autism spectrum** ***In recognition of National Autism Awareness Month***

Sunday, April 14, 2013
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
At the JM McDonald Sports Complex
4292 Fairgrounds Dr. – Cortland, NY

Parents are asked to stay and play!

- Family fun and games
- Refreshments
- Bounce House
- Open Gym



Katie Bassity, Special Education Teacher at the Cortland Preschool, has recently become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). This national certification requires specific coursework in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) along with 1500 hours of supervision by another BCBA and passing of a national Board examination. Congratulations Katie!

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Remembering our Dear Friend Margaret “Gibby” Gibson

by Roger Sibley, former Executive Director at Franziska Racker Centers

There was always Gibby. From my first day at The Special Children’s Center to my last day at Franziska Racker Centers, there was Gibby. Some places are said to have spirits, some sort of presence that can often be sensed, perhaps more in quiet times, but never absent. Gibby was never a quiet presence, graciously sharing ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings, sharing herself with us all.

Board members came and went, some staff stayed and many moved along, but Gibby was my rock, my boss, my cheerleader, my critic, and always my friend. The British classify times by the royals, Elizabethan or Victorian England. The past three decades at Franziska Racker Centers may be the Age of Gibby.

Board members came and went, some staff stayed and many moved along, but Gibby was my rock, my boss, my cheerleader, my critic, and always my friend.

Gibby had been on the Board of Directors a couple years before I arrived, and cycled off and on a few times as the by-laws required, but she never went away. In 1982 we were considering moving to larger quarters, and Gibby helped make the decision to buy the elementary school on Wilkins Road that has served us well. In the late 1980s Racker Centers diversified, adding respite, mental health, and residential, and again Gibby was there. She co-chaired our Half-Century Campaign which celebrated our first fifty years in 1998, and recently co-chaired “Making Room,” modernizing our preschool and adding needed space.

The Learning Center at our site on Wilkins Rd. is named for Gibby’s great friend Jean Dunlavey, and inside, a conference room is named for Gibby, as is our Tompkins preschool. But seen or unseen, her fingerprints are on so many important things that Franziska Racker Centers does for our community.

Who was this woman, and why did she give so much time, energy, love, and yes money, to our organization? The easy answer is, it’s complicated. There is no question that one of her great passions was children, and she loved being with them. Racker Centers has always been graced by wonderful people, and I think Gibby really enjoyed being with staff, volunteers, and our many friends.

I think something that attracts many of us is that Racker Centers’ Mission is important, the things we do and the results we get make a real difference for people. We all



thrive on significance of effort and meaningful results. So for all Gibby did for our organization, all she gave to us, I believe she got full measure in return.

I will miss seeing her, miss knowing that she is deeply involved with Franziska Racker Centers, confident that we all will remember her fondly.

SPRING 2013

OUTLOOK
www.rackercenters.org

Franziska Racker Centers
3226 Wilkins Road
Ithaca, NY 14850



MISSION

We are dedicated to helping people with special needs and their families have good lives, with opportunities to learn, to be responsible, to feel cared for, to share, to be connected to others. We are committed to creating a culture of inclusion in our community, celebrating the richness that diversity and interdependence bring.

VISION

We are inspired by the vision of our founding families: that all people with disabilities will be valued members of a welcoming and supportive community.

EDITOR Heather Hughes, Director of Public Relations

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CONTRIBUTORS Heather Hughes, Dawn Bricen LaMorte, Roger S. Sibley

IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER

Makes Giving to Racker Centers a Smart Tax Decision

In 2013, tax legislation permits you to transfer assets from your IRA to a qualified charitable organization without increasing your taxable income. If you are 70 ½ or older with IRA assets and would like to help make a gift, contact Perri LoPinto today!

Perri@rackercenters.org / 272-5891



Cornell Men's Hockey teammates Andy Iles, Nicholas D'Agostino, and Erik Axell visit Isabelle from the toddler classroom.