Kim Barthel Inspires and Educates During "Decoding the Autistic Brain" Seminar

by Patrick Schloupt, Preschool Special Education Teacher

In December of 2015, Franziska Racker Centers hosted a four day event, “Decoding the Autistic Design,” that brought service providers, community members, and parents together to explore the relationship between neurobiology and autism. On day one, a fully packed Sibley Conference room listened to Kimberly Barthel OTR/L, C/NDT, well-known occupational therapist with over 30 years of experience, speak about how this relationship is more apparent than one could imagine. Known for her work in sensory processing, neurobiology, and attachment theory, Kim is also a teacher, researcher, speaker, facilitator, and writer.

Kim has an incredible ability to break down dense theory and then articulate this information in a way that is more easily understood. This ability kept her day one audience actively engaged. And by the end of the first day, each member of her audience came away with simple, yet applicable information that could be used in their personal and professional lives.

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How we provide and care for all of our citizens speaks to who we are as a society. Is our Governor living up to his responsibilities? One might wonder as we have seen him, year after year, cut the funding non-profit agencies receive to provide these critical services. And now he supports a minimum wage increase but hasn’t funded it in his budget. This final unfunded mandate may very well be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Raising the minimum wage without the funding to support it will cost Racker Centers over $2 million, each year. In simple terms – if the Governor does not fund the proposed wage increase, Franziska Racker Centers will be forced to close. If we are forced to close, 3,000 people and their families will be without needed services and supports. And 80 staff will be without jobs. What happens to New York’s pledge to care for people with disabilities? The pledge gets broken.

I wish you could meet some of our dedicated staff. For them, the job of providing direct care for people with disabilities is a calling. The work they do day in and day out is difficult, challenging and rewarding. I agree! They should be paid more! But our funding to provide these services comes from the state. The state made a pledge to make these services available. The state needs to ensure that we have the funding so these critical programs can continue. If the minimum wage is increased without the funding, we would have no choice but to close our doors.

It is now more critical than ever for all of our voices to be heard. Here at Franziska Racker Centers we have staff and families traveling to Albany to meet with our state representatives, asking them to advocate for us as the Governor puts together his budget. This final unfunded mandate may very well be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Raising the minimum wage without the funding to support it will cost Racker Centers over $2 million, each year. In simple terms – if the Governor does not fund the proposed wage increase, Franziska Racker Centers will be forced to close. If we are forced to close, 3,000 people and their families will be without needed services and supports. And 80 staff will be without jobs. What happens to New York’s pledge to care for people with disabilities? The pledge gets broken.

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It is now more critical than ever for all of our voices to be heard. Here at Franziska Racker Centers we have staff and families traveling to Albany to meet with our state representatives, asking them to advocate for us as the Governor puts together his final budget. I have been attending legislative forums locally and in Albany, meeting with other executive directors and the state, trying to figure out how we ensure that we are supported in our efforts to provide for people with disabilities in our communities. I need your help.

Governor Cuomo MUST fund his $15.00 minimum wage proposal. This funding is critical to the health, safety, and well-being of people with developmental disabilities. To raise the wage and not fund it will leave the most vulnerable New Yorkers without the services they need. Tell the Governor to keep his promise!

Thank you for your help. If you would like to get more involved join our Listserve on our website: rackercenters.org, or send an email to Perri LoPinto at: perri@rackercenters.org. And thanks again for your continued support of Franziska Racker Centers and the work we do to make our community a welcoming and caring place to live. We can’t do it without you.

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WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

NATALIE M. FRENCH
Natalie is an attorney with Harris Beach PLLC, practicing in the areas of corporate and commercial real estate law. She is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Villanova University and Syracuse University College of Law. Natalie served as an Associate Director of the Racker Centers in 2015, serving on the Community Relations and Development Committee. Natalie is a native Ithacan, and currently lives in Ithaca with her husband Brandon and their golden retriever, Gus.

AMY THOMAS
Amy is a life-long resident of Cortland N.Y. She has been a Registered Nurse for 35 years after receiving her Associates Degree in Nursing at Tompkins Cortland Community College and her Bachelors Degree in Nursing from Syracuse University. Over her nursing career she has worked as a staff nurse, college health nurse, nursing supervisor, nursing manager, and is currently working as the Director of the Urgent Care Centers at Cayuga Medical Center. Amy is a current board member for Gadaabout and is involved with the American cancer Society Community and Coaches vs Cancer committee. Amy resides in Cortland with her husband Gary Thomas.

KAY WOOD
Kay is a life-long resident of Cortland County graduating from Cortland High and working for a number of years as a secretary at Pall Trinity and SUNY Cortland. After the birth of her son, Kay furthered her education at TCA and became a Registered Nurse, initially working with traumatic brain injury patients and eventually working for many years at the JM Murray Center serving individuals with intellectual/ developmental needs.

While Kay retired in 2009, she just completed her second term on the Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee for Cortland County and has been a member of Cortland's Family Support Services for over ten years during which time she has been involved in the RSP screening process.

Kay is a member of the leadership board at her church and their Relay for Life group. She has held past positions as a Christian education teacher and founder of a church group for adults with disabilities.

Kay resides in Homer with her adult son, Joseph, who is diagnosed with epilepsy. Kay enjoys spending time with family including her son, two daughters and three grandchildren. She also enjoys spending time gardening and traveling.
**Decoding the Autistic Brain** continued from cover

Kim Barthel has traveled the world to share her knowledge with various community organizations and agencies. How was Franziska Racker Centers able to bring Kim to the Ithaca community? Jessica Jones, Assistant Director of Quality Enhancement, played an important role on the team that worked on this. Recently, I sat down with Jessica to discuss the Kim Barthel four day conference.

**Patrick:** Who is Kim Barthel? And why did Racker Centers host this event?

**Jessica:** Kim provides an incredible and interesting blend of neurobiology, science, attachment theory, and clinical strategies to her teaching. Several clinicians had attended her conferences and suggested that Racker Centers and the community could learn a lot from her expertise. In 2014, Kim came to Ithaca for a total of five days, and provided workshops for staff across the agency, families, and the community. During these five days, Kim was also the keynote speaker at Racker Centers’ fall celebration and taught a three-day neurodevelopmental therapy course. Her presence was overwhelmingly positive. People who attended her conference felt that her experience intersected with every program throughout the agency, and blended fully with the agency’s mission, vision, and values. We became aware and interested in her 4-day course, Decoding Autism, and began discussions on bringing Kim back in 2015. The target audience for this course could be much broader, and reach far more people. During her first visit, we didn’t know how easily accessible and relevant her information was to others.

**Patrick:** What did you hope participants got out of this event?

**Jessica:** A real appreciation of integrated learning that is centers and community based, and extends across many disciplines. Integrated learning creates a shared platform that is respectful and allows each participant to bring their own learning perspective and experience. This will help support people and families in exciting new ways. There is a power when you are learning alongside families, colleagues, and other professionals. It is empowering to take away information and be able to share in a more fluid and collaborative way. You feel connected through this experience. Kim provides us with the opportunity to learn the complex array of topics within the autism field through the lens of hardcore neuroscience in ways that are easily accessible and relevant her information was to others.

**Patrick:** How does this event help support the Racker Centers’ mission & vision?

**Jessica:** Our agency is a learning organization. We aim to help people live fulfilling lives in an interdependent culture. We need to continue to strive to provide collaborative learning to families and the community; learning together connects people and builds relationships. Change is transformative; the power of learning and practicing is dynamic. As learning becomes more personalized, it connects organizations with families and builds community.

**Patrick:** What else can you add about this event?

**Jessica:** The information that was shared was easily digestible. Kim talked about living fully and well, and not specifically through the lens of autism. We learned that we can help people live better by creating opportunities for people to build connections, be more self-aware, and explore the beauty of differences. We need to celebrate life experiences in the most mindful way.

“Kim presents state-of-the-art information, gathering research from all around the world and sharing it in an active, engaging presentation. Once you have experienced Kim you become family. Franziska Racker Centers is also warm and welcoming, and an excellent venue to highlight this opportunity.” Jane Murray, Speech Pathologist Supervisor, Cerebral Palsy of Rochester.
Community Supports Local Artist
by Nkechi Ebube, Community Support Professional

Mary Beth is a young woman who has grown up with developmental disabilities. In 2000 she moved into a residential home operated by Racker Centers and lived there for a number of years. While living at High Gate, Mary Beth started painting as a way to relax. In 2014 Mary Beth moved into her own apartment and through this transition, she worked on her painting and artwork. Once in her apartment, she found herself surrounded by her drawings with a desire to share them with others. Last fall, with support from her Racker Centers’ Community Support Professional (CSP) Nkechi Ebube, Mary Beth began the pursuit of achieving her dream of exhibiting her paintings in one of Ithaca’s Gallery Night Locations. Her CSP, Nkechi, was astounded by her artwork and worked to support Mary Beth’s dream to showcase her art in the community by looking for venues that would exhibit her art. Nkechi took Mary Beth to Buffalo Street Bookstore to speak with the manager several times during the month of September and approach him about a possible art show. She encouraged Mary Beth to express all of her concerns regarding whether she could sell the paintings, and to ask questions regarding what materials were needed to prepare for the art exhibit. In the months leading up to the exhibit, Mary Beth chose the paintings she was most fond of and, with the help of Nkechi, created the brand name of “MB” to publicize the show.

Opening night was quickly approaching and Mary Beth could not help but repeat how incredulous it was that she was now identified as a featured local artist with her own art exhibit. Racker staff Laura Coletta and Kelly McKee, along with Nkechi, helped Mary Beth set up her show and hang her painting. On her big night, an exciting number of people attended. The art exhibit was composed of an eclectic and vibrant community and Mary Beth was at the center of it. Nkechi would prompt Mary Beth at the beginning to speak about her art and the exhibit was composed of an eclectic and vibrant community and Mary Beth was at the center of it. Nkechi would prompt Mary Beth at the beginning to speak about her art and the story behind it to the many attendees from the community. Shortly after, Mary Beth started approaching and engaging in conversations with people looking at her paintings. Mary Beth sold more than 10 paintings that night; 2 of them within the first 10 minutes! All in all, the night was a complete success. Mary Beth at the center of it. Nkechi would prompt Mary Beth at the beginning to speak about her art and the story behind it to the many attendees from the community. Shortly after, Mary Beth started approaching and engaging in conversations with people looking at her paintings. Mary Beth sold more than 10 paintings that night; 2 of them within the first 10 minutes! All in all, the night was a complete success. Mary Beth at the center of it. Nkechi would prompt Mary Beth at the beginning to speak about her art and the story behind it to the many attendees from the community. Shortly after, Mary Beth started approaching and engaging in conversations with people looking at her paintings. Mary Beth sold more than 10 paintings that night; 2 of them within the first 10 minutes! All in all, the night was a complete success.

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Patrick: How can those who missed this event access materials and content?

Jessica: We videotaped this event with the intention of editing it and making it available for future learning through Racker Centers’ Autism Lending Library. You can also view Kim’s website: http://kimbarthel.ca/.

Patrick: What are some additional trainings Racker Centers will be offering in the future?

Jessica: • “Building Bridges out of Poverty” – see article on page 5

• Supporting individuals through valued attachments (SIVA)—this training will take place within our partner program with TST BOXES and will train both our staff and BOXES staff that work to support children’s mental health.

• Don Castaldi, Psy.D., - Co-Founder of the SIVA training will lead the local training in which the final three days will incorporate a train-the-trainer component so that Racker and BOXES staff can share their knowledge with other colleagues after the training is complete.

Does the work of a Community Support Professional sound like a fulfilling career?

Racker Centers has many openings offering flexible schedules on both a part and full-time basis in the field of Community Support Professional, Direct Support Professional and many others. Please contact Jeanette Martin, Director of Recruitment or check out the open positions at www.rackercenters.org/employment to learn more.

Thank YOU to those partners who helped make the Kimberly Barthel Training “Decoding the Autistic Brain” possible

Thank You Enterprise Holdings Foundation for your generous donation of $2,000 to fund a wheelchair scale for our residential program allowing residents that are medically frail to monitor weight, impacting important medication needs.

Thank you to Ithaca College

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MISSION STATEMENT
We support people with disabilities and their families to lead fulfilling lives by providing opportunities to learn and be connected with others.

VISION STATEMENT
We envision a world where all people know they belong.

SAVE THE DATE for our Community Celebrations!

Tioga Community Celebration - May 12, 2016 at Owego Treadway Inn

Cortland Community Celebration - date TBD

Tompkins Community Celebration - October 11, 2016 at Ithaca College, Emerson Suites