

OUTLOOK



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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**Staff Bring Their Talents to
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Meet Kya

Kya is a sweet girl with a smile that flashes wide as she sees Lisa, her SEIT (Special Education Itinerant Teacher) from Racker Centers, enter her Newark Valley Head Start classroom. Lisa sees Kya there two days a week, which has worked out to be a wonderful transition for Kya to her new classroom after attending Racker Centers' special education preschool program last year.

Continued on page 3...

From the Desk of Dan Brown



In my letter to you in the Spring Outlook, I ended by saying, "With the support of our wonderful staff and the families we serve, I know Franziska Racker Centers can meet the needs of our community now and in the future".

This was never more evident than during the March 2013 advocacy campaign to change Governor Cuomo's proposed cut in our funding from \$1,000,000 to something less. The four week advocacy campaign got the cut reduced by 25%, an amazing victory, but the story didn't end there. Because of the great efforts of our staff, friends and families we found out recently that Governor Cuomo approved changing how the

remaining cut was to be implemented. We were told that this was a direct reflection of the overwhelming number of letters, phone calls and emails during the advocacy campaign. The change approved by Governor Cuomo will mean that our cut was reduced by an UNBELIEVABLE 95%! The revised amount of our cut is now \$50,000. THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

I have three stories to share that reflect the commitment that staff, family and friends have for the Racker Centers.

- The grandmother of a child in our Owego preschool emailed me to say that she got 195 letters signed, addressed and mailed to legislators and finished by asking, "What else can I do to help?".
- A friend called me less than 24 hours after I sent out an e-mail urging people to call the Governor's office and said, "Governor Cuomo's voice mail system is completely full and isn't accepting any more messages!"
- A staff member, who works in one of our homes to support individuals with disabilities, sent me an email that said: "Most of us who work for the Residential Program, as I do, are willing to go to great lengths to ensure that the health, safety and quality of life of those in our care will always remain the highest priorities. Making a phone call, writing a letter, or even merely signing a pre-written letter seem like small requests compared to the daily responsibilities we shoulder as a matter of course. For the best of us, it's more than a job. It's a calling."

The staff member's closing sentence in his email says it all: "we are dedicated to making Franziska Racker Centers as strong and as meaningful in its mission as it can be."

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MEET KYA...*Continued from cover*

When Kya was 1 ½ years old, she received an evaluation through Racker Centers and was diagnosed with autism. She began receiving services through the Tioga County Early Intervention Program with a number of service providers including Racker Centers. Complicating matters for Kya and her family, Kya also has diabetes. Her uncontrollable tantrums and emotional reactions were often hard to determine as reactions to her sugar levels that fluctuate throughout the day or as behaviors as a result of her autism. But once services began, Kya began to change. The speech, occupational therapies, and special instruction Kya was receiving made a great impact. She was quick to learn new skills by working with her therapists and with Jean Palmiter, Special Education teacher at Franziska Racker Centers. When it came time for her to transition from Early Intervention Services, she was enrolled in Franziska Racker Centers' preschool program in Owego, in Lisa Linehan's classroom. Much preparation needed to take place in order to make Kya's health management successful in school. At Racker, she received nursing services for her diabetes, and occupational and speech therapies in an integrated special education preschool setting. At first Kya was reluctant to leave her

mother, and had many tantrums. It was hard for her to adapt to change easily, which is a struggle for many children with autism. After just four months, Lisa remembers seeing a dramatic change in Kya. "Kya began to separate more easily from Mom. She was taking the bus, engaging with other children and was happy in the classroom. She went from having tantrums every day to a lot less frequently and by the end of the year, a tantrum was rare," states Lisa. She continues, "At the end of the year, Kya had come a long way, and while I felt like she no longer needed a full special education program, I felt like she still needed some support in Head Start." Kya was approved for SEIT services through Racker, as well as speech and occupational therapies that she receives through other providers, all within her Head Start setting.

Kya's Mom, Amy, looks back on Kya's progress and says, "I saw a huge difference right off the bat in Kya's behavior when she began preschool at Racker Centers. At first she did not like being around other kids, it was even hard to get her to play with her siblings. The more she worked with her therapists and teachers however, the more she began playing one-on-one with other children, and then was even able to play in small



groups." Amy continues, "I love that Lisa was able to transition as Kya's SEIT teacher this year. It's helped Kya to have a familiar face in her new program." (Lisa now works as an itinerant special education teacher with Racker Centers, traveling to work with children in the community or in their homes.) Amy continues, "Kya has come such a long way. She's learned important social skills and I'm happy to say I've just enrolled her in Kindergarten for the fall."



Read Sylas's story on Page 4

This year, our top fundraising priority is Early Childhood Services. The early years are among the most important in a child's development. Providing services for children when they are young is often the "Window of Opportunity" for helping them grow, learn and thrive. The stories on Kya and Sylas in this edition of our Outlook publication highlight how instrumental Early Intervention, preschool special education, and related therapies and services are for a child and their entire family's quality of life.

The reality is, the funding Racker Centers receives covers only about 70% of the actual costs of our programs. It's important for us to continue advocating for the services for all individuals with disabilities in our community, focusing on early treatment and helping people with special needs and their families have good lives.

SYLAS'S STORY

Aaron and Michael Wood have faced an emotional roller coaster since their beautiful son, Sylas, was born. Frustratingly, they know little more today than the first day, other than Sylas has a genetic disorder. When he was born, he experienced bouts of apnea and needed to be on a monitor. While in the hospital at only one month old, an MRI revealed Sylas had brain abnormalities. The family has worked with a geneticist since then and have gone through every type of testing in hopes of learning more. They have only received one diagnosis, Hypotonia, meaning low tone, describing Sylas's symptom of low muscle tone.

In order to start addressing some of his physical challenges, Sylas began receiving Early Intervention services at five months old, starting with physical therapy through Racker Centers. Nancy Bruce, his Physical Therapist, says Sylas has improved greatly over time. "When I first started working with Sylas, I started seeing him at his family's house two days per week. I could see his eagerness to play and express himself. We started working on head control, and I worked with him and his Dad on some exercises on the floor. His family has carried

through on so many suggested activities, they are wonderful," Nancy states.

When Sylas was 21 months old, his parents decided to enroll him in the daycare program at Racker Centers' Cortland site. Aaron states, "The teachers at Racker are great, everyone in the building knows him." She continues, "Sylas is now receiving eight therapies a week which are incorporated into his daily classroom activities, giving him continuous support." When Sylas was first enrolled in daycare, he could only get around with the help of an adult, or by using an army crawl. Three months later, Sylas was crawling and pulling himself up to a standing position in order to play with other children in his classroom.

Sylas's daycare teacher, Roxanne (Roxi) McCall, and her Assistant, Ann Seymour, are both so thrilled to be working with Sylas, celebrating every success with him. They often look for new pieces of equipment to assist him in class or on the playground or gym. Roxi enthusiastically shares, "When Sylas first started in our classroom, he would have very little interaction with his peers, and would cry when other children would



Sylas works on an art project with Ann Seymour.

come near him to play." Sylas has always had an outgoing personality, but he couldn't express himself. "Now, Sylas uses his walker to get around the room and play with his friends. He's beginning to shake his head up and down to communicate yes or no, and is beginning to use some sign language and sounds to communicate," continues Roxi.

Aaron continues, "Everyone around Sylas has learned so much from him. He is so special. Throughout all of this, I've become a huge advocate of Racker Centers and the services provided. I'd recommend them to anyone."



Kerri and Sandy Ehrlich

special education preschool program working one-on-one with students who have autism or behavior problems. I was also able to shadow the school nurse. I really enjoyed this opportunity. Each day I learned something new and I am so grateful for Sandy's generosity in providing me this experience. For the Family Resource and Service Coordination Programs, I helped with paperwork, I participated in the recreation respite and after school programs, and learned the "behind the scenes" tasks that are needed to make sure the program runs smoothly. For the final part of the internship, I worked in several of the residential homes shadowing the nurse and learning different techniques for working with adults with disabilities.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to work in so many different areas of Racker Centers. I have experienced so much! My time spent here will greatly contribute to my future as a nurse and will help me as I continue my education at Pace University as a nursing student in the fall.

VOICE OF AN INTERN

My name is Kerri Dinsmore and I am a senior at SUNY Cortland. I had always dreamt of becoming a nurse. I loved the idea that I could have the ability to brighten somebody's day by caring for them and helping them be healthy. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to intern at the Cortland site of Franziska Racker Centers, and to learn more about human services and being a nurse.

Before the internship began, I met with Sandy Ehrlich. She suggested I would get the most out of the internship if I worked in a variety of different areas of the agency - the agency provides a wide range of programs for people with disabilities of all ages. She was right; working this way allowed me to see how different aspects of the agency all fit together. After some training, I spent time in the

THE SEOUL OF TEAM USA BY JON URlich

Seated in the living room of her Cayuga Heights home, Tae smiles when asked what it was like representing the United States in the Special Olympics in the country of her birth. "I was excited and nervous," she says.

Last winter Tae traveled to Pyeong Chang, South Korea to participate in snowshoeing in the 2013 World Winter Games. She was one of only five athletes from New York State to receive this honor. Tae caught the eye of coaches and fellow athletes while competing in the 2012 New York Winter Games in Rochester. She won three gold medals, placing first in the individual 100 and 200 meter and the 400 meter relay.

To insure that she was in peak physical condition, Tae embarked on an intensive eight-month regimen that included the support of a personal trainer, even spending a weekend in Lake Placid with Team USA. "Tae was extremely focused," says Team Director Tracy Williams-Batar, who oversees the residence where Tae lives. "When she wants something, she goes for it."

Setting foot on native soil was a unique experience for her. "I hadn't been there in thirty-five years," says Tae, who was adopted at the age of three. "That's a long time." One thing she couldn't have anticipated was the wave of media attention that trumpeted her arrival. As one of two United States athletes who were born in South Korea, her appearance was celebrated among the local population. "She has a great energy and people are drawn to her," says Williams-Batar. "It was a magical experience for Tae," says her mother, Sue. "She radiated happiness."

Grinning for the cameras, Tae recounted the journey that had brought her to Pyeong Chang. She had been involved with Special Olympics since high school, but it wasn't until three years ago that a friend suggested she try snowshoeing. Tae took to it right away. "I have strong legs," she explains.

She placed admirably in Pyeong Chang, finishing fifth in the 100 meter with a time of 1 minute, 19.96 seconds, seventh in the 200 meter with a time of 30.39 seconds, and fourth in the 400 meter relay with a time of 2 minutes,



Tae represented the USA at the Special Olympics held in Seoul.

50.63 seconds. But it wasn't all about the competition. "I felt so welcome there," Tae says. "I love to travel and meet new people."

Minutes after our interview concludes, she heads out the door for basketball practice at Cornell University's Newman Arena. For Tae, athletics aren't a part of her life—they define it. "It's been everything to her," her mother says.

Thank You!

"Thank you" events were held throughout the end of April and early May at each of our main sites in Cortland, Tompkins and Tioga Counties to thank staff, families we serve, and community members that took action during the NYS budget cut battle. Because of their advocacy efforts, the cuts Franziska Racker Centers faces are less than originally anticipated. This goes to show how important it is to have our voices heard for people with disabilities in our community.

Thank you events were made possible by Friends of Franziska Racker Centers.



Dave McNeil, Board Member, is seen here at the Cortland County gathering with Linda Smith, Aide to Legislator Barbara Lifton, Pat Montanez, Director of Residential Services and Dan Brown, Executive Director.

Tioga County preschool staff members Leslie Brown (on left), Abe Dyson (middle), and Mary-lou Ayers (right) attend the Tioga County gathering.



SPOTLIGHT

PHOTO ACTIVISM PROJECT FOCUSES ON RACKER PROGRAMS

The **PARK AWARD FOR PHOTO ACTIVISM** is a joint program of the Community Arts Partnership, Ithaca College's Park School, and the Park Foundation. It was designed to serve as a link between students and the greater Ithaca community. Students with proven photographic skills and a commitment to community activism were paired with participating non-profits to provide in-depth visual explorations of the contributions these organizations make to those they serve and our community. A special credit-bearing documentary photography course led by IC Professor Janice Levy provided students with ongoing guidance and support for these projects. Professor Levy also invited National Geographic Photographer Lynn Johnson to take part in the program. The Community Arts Partnership Gallery space hosted an exhibit of the student's photography throughout the month



of May, and a screening of the audio-visual documentaries took place in early May, with winners being announced. JP Keenan is the talented student who worked with Franziska Racker Centers on his project. His audio-visual interpretation of the Centers' residential program at Dryden Road won 2nd place, resulting in a \$500 cash prize being donated to Racker Centers: This will go toward funding a basketball hoop and cement pad at the house to be enjoyed by the residents. Pictured here are two photos from JP's work from his time spent in the residential program. JP states, "It was a wonderful experience being given the opportunity to photograph in the Dryden Road home. I was able to witness firsthand the incredible patience, care, and love the staff give to all the kids. Getting to witness the change in the residents and see the time and patience they were given was something I'll never forget."



Thank you to the residents Viktor, Matthew, Katie and their families, and to those we support out in the community Erik, Emily and Gilday who participated in JP's project. Thank you to all of the staff who worked with JP on this project including: Jane Loiacono, Jacob Vosper, Emily Stamp, Brian Johnson, Marlene Tagliavento, Austin MacRae, Dorothy Lovelace, and Sue Kiltz. Special thanks to the Community Arts Partnership, the Park Foundation, and Ithaca College for making the Park Award for Photo Activism possible.

Watch JP's audio-visual documentary by clicking on the You Tube link at the bottom of the www.rackercenters.org website.

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DONOR SPOTLIGHT

GENE AND JEANNE YARUSSI BY PERRI LOPINTO

“You both are so involved with the community. Was it always that way?” I ask. Gene smiles and thinks for a minute. “It’s been a journey toward that.” Jeanne nods her head in agreement.

They have both been in Ithaca for 41 years. Twenty-seven years ago, they met and married, blending their two families together. They both came from humble backgrounds. Talking to them, it’s easy to see how much they appreciate where life has brought them, and that they understand how important it is to give back.

Gene said it was through his work at EPT (Emerson Power Transmission) that he had the opportunity to start thinking philanthropically. As CEO he oversaw a number of operations world-wide, including the Ithaca operation. The company had a contribution committee for each site, and he suddenly found himself overseeing the distribution of grants. He was intrigued by the community organizations and the needs they were looking to address. He began learning about how EPT could help address unmet needs in the communities where they operated. This also made him more aware personally about the importance of each person “leaning in” to make their community a better place.

Jeanne worked locally as an executive assistant from 1979-1988. One young child still at home kept her busy as well. But both Gene and Jeanne had personal experiences that made them very aware of the importance of a strong human services network, and as time allowed, they both became more active in the community. Jeanne says, “When you get involved and participate, you begin to really see the needs.”

Over the years they have both served with many organizations. Jeanne is active with the Ithaca Garden Club, PEO, and the Hangar Theatre. She is also very active with their church and sings in the choir. Gene has served on a number of boards including the Sciencenter, TC3 Foundation, Family and Children’s Service, and of course, on Franziska Racker Centers’ Campaign Cabinet and now on their Board of Directors.

Gene explains “I think the Racker Centers, is a great organization, excellent leadership, well-run, and important to our community.” Jeanne adds in, “I especially am interested in the programs for young children. It just touches your heart to hear the stories that families share. Racker Centers really makes a difference for them.”

As long-time supporters of Racker Centers, the Yarussis decided this year to use the IRA Charitable Rollover Provision as the vehicle for their charitable giving. “It was easy,” says Gene, “I called my financial person and gave him the information on where I wanted the gifts to be sent. If you are over 70 ½ you have to take the distribution, but now you have the option to send it directly to charitable organizations. It can have positive tax benefits. It was the right move for us, and a great way to support the Racker Centers.”



IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER PROVISION:

- IRA account holders age 70 ½ or older are subject to IRS minimum distribution requirements
- Donors can choose to use their distribution as a charitable contribution, but **THE DISTRIBUTION MUST BE SENT DIRECTLY TO THE CHARITY**
- This can have positive tax benefits as the distributions, up to a total of \$100,000, will not count as income
- If you are not yet 70 ½, but will be by the end of 2013, you can still take advantage of this tax legislation – the distribution will occur after you turn 70 ½
- Franziska Racker Centers and the 3,000 people they serve annually would be very grateful for your gift!

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR FINANCIAL ADVISOR TO SEE IF THIS TAX LEGISLATION IS RIGHT FOR YOU.



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.

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Robyn Em and Dean Deljoo are both Senior Resident Counselors at East King. As avid gardeners, they are sharing their talents by building East King's first garden! Fresh herbs, veggies and flowers will be planted and enjoyed by everyone.

In the photos, resident, Carrie, works on preparing the soil as staff members Robyn Em, Jocelyn Morris, Katrina DeForrest and her husband Eric prepare the garden.