

OUTLOOK



Supporting People with Disabilities



Focusing on Belonging

See our new Mission, Vision and three-to-five year Outcome on page 3.

ON THE COVER

Steven's Story *by Ashley Yates*

On the weekends, Steven enjoys spending time with his parents, attending church on Sundays and eating grapes from their fruit stand. Steven lives in the Campbell house, one of Racker Centers' residential homes, along with four other individuals.

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For the past few months, Steven has been keeping very busy during the week days as well since he joined the Racker family on Wilkins Road, working twice a week to help keep our beautiful building looking clean and organized.

Jim Schafrik, Custodial Supervisor, joins Steven every Tuesday and Thursday to perform tasks such as emptying the recycling and trash, vacuuming the carpets, sanitizing and cleaning the door handles, and washing



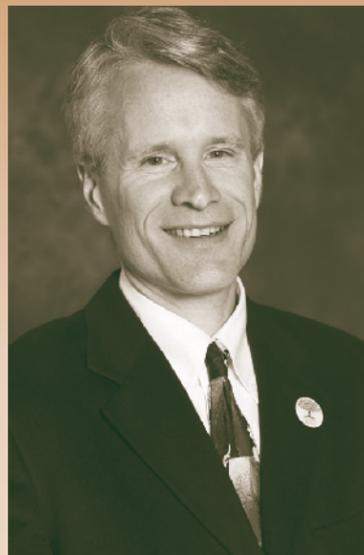
Jim Schafrik with Steven

the windows. "Every time I meet up with Steven at the beginning of the day, he is very excited. I always ask him what he wants to do first, even though I already know the answer." Jim knows Steven wants to empty the recycling and garbage first. "We'll start taking out the paper and he'll tell people 'we'll be back to get the trash!' Steven is very enthusiastic and he always looks forward to his return visits. Once we finish in someone's office, he tells them, 'We'll be back on Thursday!'"

Steven was faced with needing to find a way to fill his days when the transportation he took to his previous job was no longer available. He, along with his network, were able to think about the things that were important to him to find a solution, and the opportunity at Racker Centers' Administrative site came about.

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FROM DAN'S DESK



Executive Director Dan Brown

Periodically organizations need to go on a strategic planning journey. For Racker Centers 2014 was the year we started our journey. There are two main factors that influenced our decision to begin the journey now:

- The needs of the individuals that Racker Centers supports have changed significantly.
- The regulatory environment in which Racker Centers operates is changing a LOT.

Consequently, the goal of our strategic planning is to make sure that Racker Centers is meeting the needs of the individuals that we support in our community, our Mission, and is advancing our Vision. Since the strategic planning journey involves aligning everything to our Mission and Vision statements, they were the first stop on our journey. We tried to answer the questions-

- Does our Mission statement align with the current community needs?
- Does our Vision statement create a future we can all be excited about?
- What's the most important thing we can be doing to advance our Vision during the next Three-to-Five Years?

Arthur Ashe wrote: "Success is a journey, not a destination. The journey is often more important than the outcome." With this as a background, our process to review our Mission and Vision statements needed to include, gathering the wisdom of the community about what we should be doing and how we should be doing it (community here means self-advocates, families, community members, partners, business leaders, board and staff). So, we created a journey that involved having nine meetings with almost 500 people in our community.

We held the meetings from March through May and I was continually humbled

by the thoughtful, inspiring and wise words that I heard from our community.

I am very excited to announce our new Mission, Vision and Three-to-Five Year Outcome statements!

Continued on next page...

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

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

THREE-TO-FIVE YEAR OUTCOME: Individuals and families that we support will know they belong to more communities of their choosing.

In the new Mission statement, I particularly like the words "lead fulfilling lives;" these key words came from the many meetings that I had with staff and reflects the work that they are doing every day.

The new Vision statement is succinct and powerful. I love the fact that it doesn't use the word disability, the world we envision is one where all people know they belong (whether they have a disability or not). This is so critical in making the Vision come to life, without connections between people with disabilities and those without disabilities our Vision will not come to fruition.

The new Three-to-Five Year Outcome (TFYO) statement will guide us as we work towards our new Vision. Our first steps in 2015 will be to figure out how to measure the TFYO, which will be complicated since we support people from birth to senior citizens in a variety of settings, but it will be well worth the effort!

I look forward to continuing this journey with you!

Dan Brown



Steven's Story, continued from cover

That is how this article came about. I recently joined the Racker team myself, as the new Administrative Coordinator in the office of Community Relations. Steven and I have become friends and have gotten to know each other while he goes about his daily rounds. I joke with him and now play a game of filling my recycling container with as much paper as I can before his next visit, since he began joking with me that my bin was always the fullest one he had to empty. He jokes with me and talks with me at every shift now. This opportunity for Steven and the resulting friendship we've formed truly showcase for me the agency's Vision; a world where all people know they belong.

When asked what do you like about Racker Centers, Steven quickly states, "It's fun, it makes me happy, Jim is fun!"



Jim and Steven wipe down the doors and windows at Racker.

Watching Steven work, it is obvious that he loves to stay busy, and he's always on the go. Talking with him one day while on a lunch break, Steven showed me the windows in the employee break room, noting that it is almost time that they are washed. He then walked me through the steps of his favorite activity. "Cloth, spray, and squeegee!" he says, adding "You need a scrub pad too." It's the average banter you will hear in a lunchroom and a welcome break to the day for both of us.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Steven continues to sweep the hallways, disinfect the door handles, empty the trash and clean up the scuff marks with a tennis ball on a stick—although sometimes he improvises. "I knew Steven cared about the work that he did the first time I saw him stop in the hallway to clean up a scuff mark by rubbing it with his shoe!" Jim says.

"What is my favorite thing about getting to know Steven?" Jim reiterates, "He really makes me laugh sometimes. Once, we were coming out of a classroom and he was holding the trash bag up and he looked at me and said, 'What do you want me to do with this bad boy?' He cracks me up and makes the work day more enjoyable."

Upon seeing the first draft of this article before it went to print, Steven proudly showed it off to his residential staff saying, " Heidi, look at this!"

Speak with many throughout the offices and halls of our Wilkins Road campus and you'll hear how Steven's humor is enjoyed by so many. What I've seen is that people don't need to strive to make Steven know that he belongs just because he has a disability. He has gotten to know people and has created relationships by joking around, taking part in a meaningful role and taking pride in the way he spends his days, just as I have since starting in my position. He fits in, just as I do, and just as we all hope we do in one way or another.

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Gavin's Story by Esty Schachter

Gavin is a bright-eyed, bubbly little boy who loves to swim and play pretend with his trucks and cars. He can name the kind of vehicles he sees when he goes out with his family and especially loves Toyotas since his dad has one and they go mudding and trail riding together. These days, his mother Tristan says, Gavin is very inquisitive, wanting to know everything about anything. This is a joy, as it wasn't always easy for Gavin to express himself and navigate his world.

Gavin began receiving speech, occupational therapy and physical therapy services through Racker Centers as a toddler. Early intervention services were very helpful, and as Gavin approached school age, an integrated preschool was suggested to further provide learning and social opportunities.

At first, the idea of sending Gavin to Racker Centers' Spencer PreK classroom was upsetting and scary to Tristan, who was unsure of what that would be like for him. A preschool in a larger elementary school building was, understandably, an intimidating idea.

Sally Lawrence, Gavin's future PreK teacher, was at the meeting when Tristan made the decision to send him to preschool. Tristan remembers it clearly. "Sally said, 'I will do my best to make sure Gavin has an amazing experience,' and she and her team did just that."

Tristan recounts how Sally and her team became the center for Gavin. "They were right there to help make a difference, to address any problem that came up." Sally became 'my Sally,' Gavin's highest compliment and his way of sharing his own feelings of comfort and connection.

Sally reflected on the progress Gavin made during the course of his preschool year. In the beginning, he required support from classroom staff to transition between activities and participate appropriately. He benefitted from help with peer interactions and to maintain focus on teacher-structured small and large group activities. As his speech was difficult to understand, he was encouraged to use his words to get his needs and wants met. Sally shared that, "although Gavin did require support at the beginning to

become an independent and productive member of his classroom, he soon needed to be pushed out of the nest and out of his comfort zone! Thanks to Pam and Carol, my awesome classroom support staff, as well as his therapists (Jody Mailloux for speech, Cheryl Herold & Sue Raymond for occupational therapy and Denise Price for physical therapy), Gavin has now made a successful transition to kindergarten in the same school he attended for Pre-K. The team at Van Etten Elementary, including Gavin's kindergarten teacher Lynne Felt, are supportive of our classroom and students, which has also helped to make Gavin's transition to Kindergarten a success."

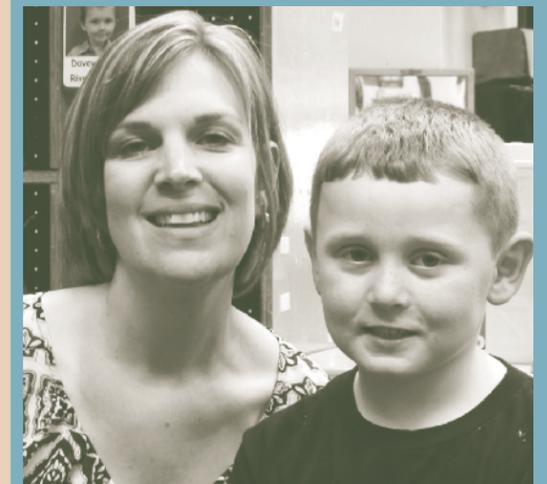
Sally feels that having an integrated program for Gavin right in his own school district was crucial to his being able to adapt to the rigors of kindergarten. He already knew the school and how to get around; he had gone to music, gym, library, computer lab and had eaten meals in the cafeteria.

At first, the transition to kindergarten had some challenges. Gavin was so attached to Sally, Pam and Carol and his Racker Centers' team, and didn't understand why he could no longer spend his days with them. There were meltdowns at first but assistance from behavior specialist Kim Van Norman proved very helpful. Kim created a book for Gavin, with pictures of his previous preschool staff as well as his new kindergarten teachers. Kim used the book to emphasize everyone's care for Gavin, as well as the transition. The book was just what Gavin needed to understand the change that occurred and to adjust to it.

Another program that Gavin has participated in is respite. Tristan describes Gavin and his respite worker, Paige, as being "wonderful together." The program offers Gavin the opportunity to attend activities in the community, "learning how to be safe and socially appropriate" while also having fun.

Tristan encourages other parents to explore what Racker Centers has to offer. Tristan shared that it has been an amazing journey, with very supportive staff and programming that have shown care and nurturing towards Gavin. "His life has flourished. He has so many people who want to help him." Tristan also commented on the sense of community she gets from being part of Racker Centers. "I don't feel like 'the only parent.' I can feel so comfortable wherever we go."

As for Gavin, Tristan says, "he truly is my hero. I couldn't imagine our lives without this special little man. I couldn't imagine our lives without Racker Centers."



Gavin with kindergarten teacher Lynne Felt (above), and PreK teacher Sally Lawrence (below)



Racker Centers' Fall Celebration Honors Community and Staff

This year's breakfast was held at Emerson Suites on the Ithaca College campus. The morning included a lovely ceremony to honor recipients for their dedication and commitment to the mission and vision of Racker Centers, and ended with a moving key note presentation by this year's speaker, Kimberly Barthel.

Kim Barthel OTR/L, C/NDT, highly sought after facilitator and speaker integrates the science of occupational therapy with cutting edge practice to support the conscious evolution of the human spirit. Her approach to serving clients is visionary and eclectic. In addition to providing a moving keynote at this year's Fall Celebration entitled, "Moving Beyond Labels," she had a very busy week presenting several times both in Cortland and in Ithaca. She ended her week instructing a three day NDT course for therapists and practitioners.



THIS YEAR'S AWARD RECIPIENTS INCLUDE:

The Inspiration Award-

Jan Dyson (third from left), Senior Family Support Coordinator
Mary R. Hause (second from left), Preschool Special Education Teacher
Margaret Lisk (fourth from left), Shift Supervisor, Residential Program
Susan S. Thomas (fifth from left), Turning Point Program Director

The Franziska Racker Award -

Annemarie Mattison (sixth from left), Social Worker, Preschool Special Education Program

The Special Friend Award - Topher Scott (far left), Assistant Men's Hockey Coach, Cornell University

The Brick Miscall Community Service Award - The Tioga County Boys & Girls Club (far right)

MAKING IT HAPPEN

THANK YOU!

Franziska Racker Centers extends a big THANK YOU to Mutual of America for their donation in support of the agency's Annual Fall Celebration. (Pictured) Perri LoPinto, Director of Community Relations, accepts a check from Brian Thomas, Vice President at Mutual of America.



Playhouse Donated

Gillian Ryan, Mom of Eric, who lives in one of Racker Centers' residential houses, was the lucky winner of the beautiful playhouse that was built to raise money for Habitat of Cortland. The playhouse sat outside of Audrey Edelman's offices on Rt 13, where many might have noticed it as you drove by. The playhouse now lives in Cortland on the playground for our preschool special education program where kids will be able to enjoy it for years to come. Thank you Gillian! And thank you Habitat of Cortland!



Mildred Faulkner Truman Foundation Funds Tricycles

Racker Centers' special education preschool program in Owego, N.Y. is riding in style because of a generous grant awarded from the Mildred Faulkner Truman Foundation. Racker Centers approached the Foundation earlier this year, asking them to fund specialized riding equipment for the preschool program to help children with their gross motor skill development. The Foundation's mission is to provide worthwhile grants to organizations that enhance and benefit the residents of Tioga County, N.Y. The Foundation chose to fund the request in full. With these funds, Racker Centers was able to purchase fifteen special needs riding toys, 15 safety helmets, and a 10'x10' size shed to adequately store the equipment. The riding toys and equipment will be used by children enrolled in the preschool program for years to come.

The Mildred Faulkner Truman Foundation stewards the charitable trust of Mildred Faulkner Truman, who served as the Director of the Owego National Bank as well as the Tioga County Historical Society. A successful investor, Truman accumulated a substantial estate, and through wishes expressed in her will upon her passing in 1983, established this Foundation in her name to fund grants for nonprofit organizations throughout Tioga County.



WINTER 2014

OUTLOOK
www.rackercenters.org

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Racker Team TUFF eNUFF



For the second year, a team of Racker Staff joined together to participate in the 2nd annual Tuff eNuff Challenge, a 5k or 10k race held at Greek Peak Mountain resort. Funds raised go to support the Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County and Cortland Prevention Resources.