

QUARTERLY | Summer 2020

OUTLOOK Racker

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Supporting People with Disabilities

Teletherapy:

Serving Children & Families

A Message From

Dan Brown

Racker Rivals

Big Red 2020

Virtual Edition

Supporting Success

Behavior Support At Home

Racker Boxes

Food Prep & Delivery
during a pandemic

ESSENTIAL!

THANK YOU TO OUR
ESSENTIAL STAFF AND
FRONT LINE WORKERS

Retirement

Longtime Leadership
Staff to Retire

*Artwork By:
Meghan McComb

PLUS...

The Art of Racker



From The Desk Of DAN BROWN

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW MORE THAN EVER - The fear and anxiety over the coronavirus has turned all of our lives upside down. Here at Racker we remain keenly focused on the people and the families we serve, and the staff that provides those services. Racker serves the most vulnerable in our community. I am hearing from our families every day that they are struggling to maintain resources or any semblance of stability for their loved ones. Most of the programs and services that Racker provided to help them have been disrupted. All of us at Racker are working hard to figure out this new landscape of shifting services to virtual platforms so we can continue to help people with disabilities and their families.

Many Racker families have children at home with challenging behaviors and high needs, and staff has had to become innovative and creative. Some services are being delivered in alternative ways, some online, and some have just been put on hold. Our mental health professionals continue to work with students through a virtual platform. In our residential program, direct support professionals and the nurses continue to serve the people that live in our houses, practicing proper safe-guards, always looking for ways to put safety first. As the residential staff were

concerned about the added exposure grocery shopping can bring, a system was developed for our 26 houses that centralized shopping and distribution. Our therapists and teachers have been creative too, posting videos for families with suggestions and guidance on educational and physical activities to help their children while at home. And our community support professionals continue to personally serve over 100 families and people with disabilities that have challenging situations and need our help. I am so proud of all our staff – they have risen to the challenge to be there as best they can for the people we serve.

We are working hard to get through this difficult time, but our funding is taking a major hit and our expenses are increasing as we acquire remote technology and personal protective equipment in response to COVID-19. When we can't provide a service, we can't collect the fees that paid staff and kept the agency running soundly. And shifting to online services presents opportunities but new costs. We need your help more than ever.

Please, make a gift to Racker.

All of us at Racker are so grateful for the help and support our community has shown us. If you can help, please know that every gift – no matter the size – truly will make a difference. We send our best to you and your family. Together we will get through these challenging times.

With Warm Regards,

Dan Brown
Executive Director



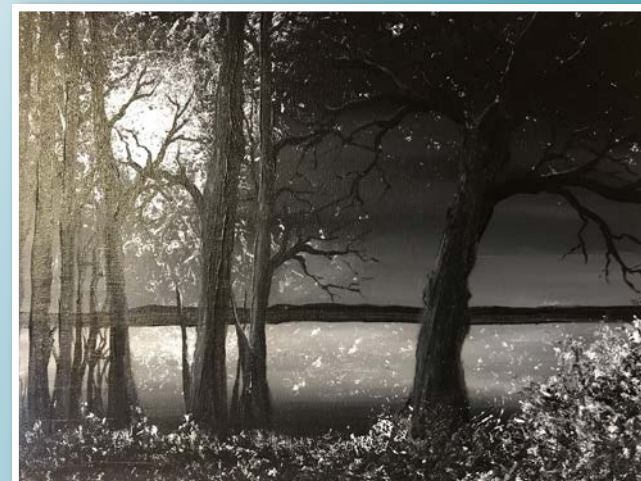
Residential staff take precautions when working

The Art of Racker

The Racker community is full of very talented individuals, students, staff members and families! *The Art of Racker* highlights the resilience and adaptability of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The works featured here are made by individuals in our preschool, residential program, community support, Racker staff, and families. Although these few images are limited to what can fit on a single page, you can browse the larger collection at www.racker.org/artofracker



"Pirate"
Rui



Jude Thomas



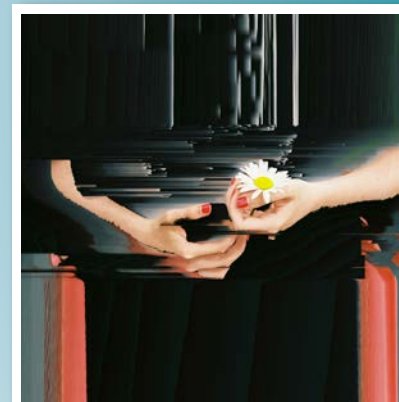
Michelle Gamba



Jasmine Tadder



"Better Together"
Emily Mahr



Zaccharie Charvolin



Connie Savon



"Somewhere Over North Dakota"
McKinzie



Kari Morse



Kristin DZ



"Life Tree"
Geoff Peppel

Serving Children and Families through Teletherapy

Before the coronavirus changed our world, Racker's team of 35 therapists provided therapy and evaluations services to over 300 children and their families in their homes, schools, community childcare settings or in our own site-based preschool special education classrooms. All of these services were hands-on and in person. Then came the health crisis.

With the directive to "distance" and stay home, all these services came to a screeching halt. For the children that needed those services, and the staff whose mission it is to serve children and families, pivoting to a new service delivery model quickly was imperative. Enter teletherapy.

"It's amazing how quickly we went from 'school is closed' to now we are doing teletherapy," says Racker's Clinical Director Anne Schneider.

"Our therapists had varied levels of experience with technology, so there was much to learn. But the team jumped in and got it going quickly. With the support of Racker's IT department and a grant from the Legacy Foundation, Racker was able to quickly expand its virtual capacities via Zoom. Bringing staff and families up to speed on the technology was just the first step. Once that was in place, the staff had to figure out how to do evaluations and therapy through a computer screen.

"I have one child that ends each session with a 'virtual hug'."

"There was information out there from clinicians that had been doing teletherapy in rural areas, so there was some guidance we could look to," says Kellie Hummel, physical therapist who has been at Racker for over 19 years. "Webinars popped up on teletherapy and our national organizations helped by putting out information on best practices. But just jumping in and then sharing what we learned with our teams really moved us along quickly."

Preparing for a teletherapy session presents unique challenges. Traditional therapy equipment that normally travels with therapists wouldn't be available, so therapists have had to be creative with what is on hand at the home. When the therapist contacts the parents to confirm the session they will then suggest some items to have handy. It might be a laundry basket, which is a useful tool for a two year old working on balance and core strength. Sue Raymond, Occupational Therapist says she has her favorite list. "I have the parents gather a bunch of stuff – beads, q-tips, crayons, playdough, even cotton balls. It's amazing the fine motor activities you can inspire with the most common things." For speech therapists Sarah Watson and Alison Bryan it's all about encouraging language. Says Sarah, "Some of us are using *Boom Cards*, which is an online website where we can use fun and interactive activities to work on speech and language skills." But they also have their stash of toys and visual props. "It's all about getting that child to engage

with you through the screen," said Alison. For most kids, they were wary in the first few sessions, but very quickly they began to focus on the familiar face they knew and were happy to see.

Teletherapy has also been a vital tool in making sure new children can be evaluated and then receive the services



Melanie O'Leary (Physical Therapist) meets with student

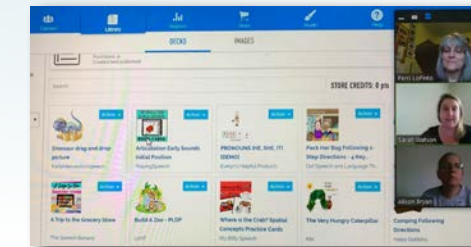
they need. Kellie Hummel is a member of Racker's Evaluations Team. Pre-covid, this team would go into the home to meet with parents and evaluate their children based on a series of tests and activities. Now Kellie works with the team and the parents over Zoom. Working with a doll to demonstrate, she will ask the parents to mimic what she is doing so she can make assessments on the child's strengths and challenges. "I am so inspired by the family's willingness to participate and do whatever they can to help this process. This wouldn't be possible without them."

"I love the feeling I get when that little face appears on that screen and they are so happy to see me!"

There is also a lot of collaborating. Shared folders have been set up where staff have access to new materials and resources. Zoom meetings are a regular occurrence for brainstorming and sharing lessons learned. Says Sue Raymond, "We are all working closely to help streamline the information the family receives.

This new world of teletherapy has posed many new challenges. Staff fatigue is a real issue. Staring at the screen can be exhausting and therapists have to be VERY flexible. If that activity you planned just isn't cutting it you need to be able to shift gears quickly even though you don't have your own equipment and supplies to fall back on. And the physical separation – therapists miss the personal touch of working hands-on with the children. But there have been silver linings too. A big one has been the opportunity to develop deeper relationships with the families. For some of the therapists, there was already a relationship with the family as they were traveling to the home to do the therapy.

But for many of the therapists, they were providing the therapy in schools, daycares, or site-based programs where parents weren't present during the session. When everything shifted to teletherapy, families had to become very active participants. Having the parents so intimately involved has enhanced communication. They are the therapists "hands" in many cases. The sessions are important for the child, but also a great opportunity for the parents to learn about their child and have a safe place to ask questions and provide feedback. Jody Scriber, physical therapist at Racker for over 40 years says "It has been wonderful to be able to support the parents as well as the children during this challenging time. I work with some very young children and it's rewarding to help a parent feel more confident in their knowledge and ability to care for their child."



Therapists give tour of new learning environment

It's a time of high stress for many families. The therapists have been working with the classroom teachers as they are in touch with their families weekly. We all want to help families get through this difficult time." At a time when staff is "distanced" from each other, the common goal of learning how to support children and families in this crisis has brought them even closer together.

Clinic Director Anne Schneider looks ahead and sees many opportunities for the skills learned during this time. "Once this health crisis resolves, we will have even more ways to connect with kids and families. In-person therapy is always our first choice, but for many reasons families might need the options that teletherapy can provide. I am so proud of our therapists. They really embraced teletherapy so they could continue providing the services families and children needed. It was a lot to pull together in a short time – but all worth it when they saw those little faces pop up on their computer screens!" 🌳



Preschool student receives physical therapy at home via Zoom



Scarlett the Therapy Dog

Another therapist affected by the transition to teletherapy is Rebecca Mosher, LCSW-R. Rebecca is a Day Treatment Counselor at Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES in Ithaca, and she is joined at work three days a week by her therapy dog, Scarlett.

Scarlett plays a vital role at TST BOCES, providing comfort and sensory support to the students in group counseling sessions through touch, snuggles, laughter, and play. While those tactile experiences are not possible over a Zoom group counselling session, Rebecca and Scarlett have managed to adapt. As Scarlett noses her way in front of Rebecca's face during a call, she is a charming and sweet face to see on the other side of a computer screen. Rebecca believes that the possibility of seeing Scarlett is a draw for students to attend group session. She says, "I think for most, it's another piece of familiarity that is grounding and comforting – to know that she's still there and present and still being a bit of a goof even though they can't be with her."

RESIDENTIAL FOOD DELIVERY SERVICE

For over 30 years each home in our Residential Program has completed their own weekly grocery shopping. Long grocery lists, shopping carts filled to capacity, and countless trips carrying groceries from van to house are no more. Now, the 'new norm' is the *Racker Boxes – Ding Dong Delivery Service*: buying large quantities of food and household items through local distributors and delivering to each of our 25 residential homes in Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties.

In an effort to reduce risk of COVID-19 exposure to our most vulnerable individuals and direct support staff, Katie Boardman, Director of Residential Services, along with Pat Montanez, Director of Program Development, worked together to coordinate this new food delivery service. This also accommodated a growing concern that staff would not be able to buy groceries in large quantities due to scarcity.

With the help of Robb Stone, Preschool Kitchen Supervisor; Holly Seager, Residential Dietician; and Cathe Oberlander, Residential Health Care Director, a multi-layered plan was created. Operationalizing the plan further required the support of facilities staff: Dan Fuller, Dave Clary, Jim Schafrik, and Ron Jones, Director of Facilities. Dan and Ron built three cold boxes with heavy duty wheels and pull bars to keep the perishable food fresh and safe during daily deliveries.

Melissa Brewer, Preschool Food Service Provider and Jody Sidle, Clinic Evaluation Team Coordinator stepped in as overseers of the new *Racker Boxes* Storage Unit, also known as Racker's Sibley Conference Room. The Storage Unit houses three commercial refrigerators, one commercial freezer and a lot of fresh produce. Tables once meant for conferences and meetings are now stacked with boxes of food, produce, beverages, and anything individuals in the Residential program might want or need.



Each staff plays an important role within the *Ding Dong Delivery Service*, ranging from checking in with houses, prepping dinner items and packaging food, filling PPE (personal protective equipment) and cleaning product orders, arts & craft supplies, interagency mail, and of course: the deliveries that cover three counties and hundreds of miles.

After working out a few glitches in the first week, the Ding Dong Delivery Service is now a well-oiled machine. It's a hard-working team that develops solutions to any challenges that come up. Pat Montanez says, "We see these challenges as little bumps in the road that keep us paying attention to providing a good service for the residents and staff." For instance, the limited availability of beef, poultry and pork resulted in the direct purchasing of proteins straight from local farmers. Pat continues, "While we do not know what the next few months will bring, we do know the residential program's food pantry and freezers will be filled."

SUPPORTING SUCCESS

Another Racker program that has been navigating alternative and new ways to support individuals and families is Supporting Success, a behavior support program that helps individuals develop skills and eliminate challenging behaviors. The team has been sending home materials to assist families and children with creating new routines. Erin Arras, Behavior Specialist, created laminated schedules that allow children to help set the expectations and routines for the day.



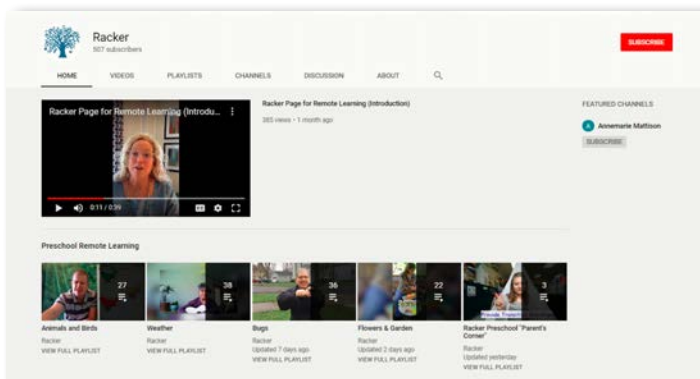
A child practices using a new laminated routines schedule

One parent said that she found the schedule very helpful for her daughter, who was struggling to adapt to such a drastic change in her day to day life. Erin says, "having a picture schedule has given her daughter a visual to go with their daily structure which is very abstract for her. It has also given them a common language. Her daughter is able to have some choice in terms of the order in which they do things and she will ask to see the schedule throughout the day to know what is next."

REMOTE LEARNING ON YOUTUBE

As news took hold that Early Childhood services would be postponed or put on hold for an indefinite amount of time, teachers, education professionals, and therapists began producing educational and therapeutic videos to be hosted on YouTube. The YouTube platform presented the quickest, no cost solution for a global problem. Not only does this approach offer a free alternative in supporting the Racker community, it has become a valuable resource for the whole world.

Racker's YouTube page (www.youtube.com/rackermovies) has over 530 subscribers, up over 100 just this year. So far for 2020, people have watched Racker YouTube videos almost 30,000 times for a total of approximately 700 hours. While the bulk of viewership comes from friends and family in the Racker Community; people in over 20 countries have viewed Racker content this year alone.



Gretchen Jacobs, Director of Preschool and ECS, gives a remote learning introduction

PAT MONTANEZ



After 26 years of hard work and successes, Pat Montanez will retire from Racker on June 30th, 2020. Her dedication to our organization, and our residential program, is inspiring to all that have had the pleasure of working with Pat.

In the late 80's, Racker began its Residential program. Soon thereafter Racker began adding more homes to meet the community need. Meeting the community need resulted in Racker looking for individuals with Residential management experience. In 1993, Carolyn Bartell hired Pat Montanez as the Assistant Director of Residential. Pat brought experience and residential operating knowledge to the program.

When Pat began her tenure as Racker's Residential Director, our organization operated two homes. Drawing on her expertise she grew the program to 26 homes and helped build the largest program in the organization. Pat was able to provide homes for 144 residents and grew her staff from 75 to 350 people. She is known for her ability to help staff in Residential grow and find their niche within our organization. Many key staff members found their home at Racker through their experience in the Residential program.

While we will all miss her and the regular visits from her dog, Liberace, all of us at Racker congratulate Pat on her retirement and wish her the best of luck! *Thank you, Pat.*



Pat at a Racker picnic circa mid 2000s

PERRI LOPINTO



Perri started her career with Racker in 1997 as the Volunteer Coordinator. Her knack of inspiring others to serve their community made her a perfect fit for the agency. Always upbeat and professional, Perri was promoted and served in a number of roles including Director of Community Relations and Development. She finishes her career at Racker serving as the Director of Donor Relations.

Perri accomplished many great things during her 23 years at Racker. In 1998 she successfully completed the Half Century Campaign that raised money to celebrate the organization's 50th anniversary. She worked closely with her friend and mentor, Dave Dunlop, to create a Development department that worked closely with our donors and cultivated relationships through personal outreach and friendships.



Perri with Margaret "Gibby" Gibson in 2007

In 2012, Perri completed a \$3.5 million capital campaign at Racker's Wilkins Road during one of the most difficult economic times. This campaign increased the size of the preschool, created administrative offices and community conference rooms. Her effort was herculean and the result helped to change the lives of our staff and the people in our programs.

Perri's love of Racker, our staff and our community is obvious within minutes of meeting her. She epitomizes the idea of creating a world where all people know they belong. All of us are so happy for Perri and grateful for her outstanding work at Racker. *Thank you for everything, Perri!*



SUMMER 2020

OUTLOOK

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RACKER RIVALS BIG RED GOES VIRTUAL

With COVID-19 keeping us socially distanced for the health of our community, our traditional Racker Rivals Big Red Hockey Game had to be canceled this year.

So instead, we will have our competition online!



Racker Rivals Big Red the Virtual Face-Off will begin on June 15th and end on July 15th. A fabulous roster including local favorites Greg Hartz and Mike Schafer will join forces to raise funds to support Early Childhood Services at Racker. Many of your favorite players from prior years will compete and new players will join in on the fun too. Two teams will be formed and they will compete by gathering pledges – and the highest pledging team wins! It will be an opportunity to show your support for your favorite player and for Racker and the work we do for people with disabilities in our community.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO
WWW.RACKER.ORG/HOCKEY**

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