

QUARTERLY | WINTER 2020

OUTLOOK Racker

WWW.RACKER.ORG

Supporting People with Disabilities



THANK YOU SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

THANK YOU TO ALL CURRENT AND FORMER RACKER SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS WORKING TO BUILD A WORLD WHERE ALL PEOPLE KNOW THEY BELONG. 2020 HAS BEEN A YEAR LIKE NONE OTHER AND THE WORK BEING DONE ON THE FRONTLINES DOES NOT GO UNNOTICED-
RACKER STAFF ARE DIFFERENCE MAKERS!



**STAFFMATCH
NEW WEB PORTAL**

**OTHER VOICES
IN THE 607**

**RACKER
SPEAKER SERIES**

**COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS • COMIC BOOK DESIGN • WELCOME NEW DIRECTORS
DONATIONS • EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES & MORE**



FROM THE DESK OF GAYLE PADO

Racker's Community Services team, which for years has been supporting people with disabilities to learn new skills through one-on-one staffing, has been looking at options to improve the way that Racker provides these supports. This has been an enormous challenge and we have not had the staffing resources, at the specific times or in the specific locations, to meet the demand. When we add in the restrictions and precautions associated with COVID-19, the challenges associated with providing individualized services increase. These staffing challenges are true in our *traditional* services where Racker supervisors make the connections between staff and people receiving supports. They are also true of *Self-Directed* services, where people with disabilities and their *Circle of Support* are responsible for recruiting and hiring their own staff.

Over the years, technology has offered vast growth opportunities for non-profit organizations like Racker. Not only can this be seen in administrative capacities such as networking, public outreach and video conferencing; but also in direct disability support and aids like augmentative speech devices, telehealth, and virtual learning. Imagining the possibilities available through technology helped lay the framework for Racker to develop an interactive web portal for service recipients.

Beginning in early 2021, people with disabilities and their families will be able to utilize a new, innovative and fully accessible website. *StaffMatch*, Racker's newly developed web portal, gives the people and families we support a true choice in the staff they wish to work with. It is with a great deal of gratitude for the Park Foundation's generous gift that we are excited to announce that Racker will soon be launching StaffMatch. StaffMatch uses mutual indicators such as interests, experience, qualifications, availability, and location to match prospective staff with people needing support. While participation through StaffMatch is optional, participants and families will have the ability to create a profile during any stage of their Racker support relationship, browse the profiles of available staff, and find the right match for them. Once they identify someone they are interested in working with, all they have to do is click on a link next to the person's name that will alert that staff's supervisor of the request and start the process.

Results expected through this initiative are bountiful and include:

- Empowering participants/families by providing more choice in providers/staff, and more autonomy in staff selection
- Increased access to available staffing
- Faster matches between staff and participants
- Increased control over scheduling
- More diverse opportunities for staff
- An increase in services provided overall

StaffMatch allows both the staff and families that we support to be active participants in the staffing selection process in a more hands on and meaningful way. Keep an eye out and watch for more information in the New Year about this exciting, new, and transparent platform that allows true partnership between Racker, the people we support and their families, and staff. 🌱

Gayle Pado

GAYLE PADO
Director
Family Resource Programs

Welcome to Racker!

NEW DIRECTOR OF IT

Please welcome Mike Leiter to the Racker team as the new Director of Information Technology. Mike has over ten years of experience as an IT leader and 22 years of experience in the IT field. What differentiated Mike from the other candidates was his ability to connect with people, his awareness that meeting user needs is critical and his ability to speak in plain terms about technology, i.e. not "tech" speak.



Mike Leiter - Director of IT

Could you tell us why you chose to work at Racker?

ML: For me, as I went through the interview process, I learned what Racker meant to the community and the importance of the services we provide. I quickly realized Racker would give me the opportunity to work for an organization that was making a positive impact on people's lives of all ages. As I walked around [our Wilkins Road site] learning about the preschool, I knew this was a chance to get back to an organization that created opportunities for young children. Early in my career, I worked in K-12. I enjoyed working with teachers and administration to provide technology solutions that created opportunities that students hadn't had in the past.

What has it been like for you joining the Racker team in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic?

I think the first thing was to take any typical 6-month goals someone would have starting a new position and throw them out the window. Technology has come front and center during this pandemic. Technology was a supplemental tool we used to complete our work. With the pandemic, it's become the essential piece to keep many of our operations moving forward. So to come into my role at this time, it was all about making sure we were doing our part to provide solutions to the new way we do things. I think the team has done a great job of the vast number of things that were thrown at us.

What do you foresee will be the focus for IT in the next 24 months?

We really want to continue to be a team that everyone comes to for solutions. We won't always have a solution at our fingertips but will work together to find a solution. We will focus many of our efforts on security, infrastructure, and cloud solutions over the next 2 years. As I mentioned earlier, technology has become essential. We need to make sure the tools we are providing are safe, reliable, and available in situations such as we have been put in with the pandemic.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I'd just like to thank everyone for the warm welcome you have provided. For many, I've had to meet you through email or on a Zoom call. I look forward to a time when I get to meet everyone face to face. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time. My door is always open...even if it's a virtual door. 🌱

NEW DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES

Racker welcomed Andrew Fendrick as the new Director of Facilities in August of this year. Andrew is originally from the Ithaca area. In fact, he attended elementary school in the building that is now Racker's Wilkins Road location! He pursued his dream of building an industrial electrical automation contracting business in North Carolina for many years. When an opportunity arose to purchase the home where he spent his childhood, he decided to return to Ithaca to connect with friends and family.

We got a chance to ask Andrew a couple of questions about his work and what his transition has been like this year:

What drew you to facilities and what do you like best about this work?

AF: Ever since I was a child I have been fascinated by "behind the scenes" systems of a facility, never passing up the opportunity to see how things work and function. My father, as an Electrical Prototype Engineer, was constantly working on new and exciting things on our dining room table. He would take the time to carefully explain and demonstrate their design and function. Projects ran the gamut from the Toyota Prius power inverter to components incorporated in the Mars space expedition. The best part of my job is sharing my knowledge and experience in the trades with my team to tackle the daily issues that arise.

What was it like starting this job in the middle of a pandemic?

Every day is a learning experience as we all grow together to tackle the challenges created by the pandemic. A positive aspect that has arisen from COVID-19 has been a greater care and compassion for our friends, family and co-workers. Every day I feel thankful being a part of such a strong, confident and knowledgeable team. 🌱



Andrew Fendrick
Director of Facilities

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RACKER BOARD OF DIRECTORS PRESIDENT MAKES DIFFERENCE

Nancy Malina has always been there for Racker. If there is a need, she is the first person to volunteer. When asked to join our team on our advocacy trips to Albany, Nancy immediately volunteers to lend her voice and support for people with disabilities all over the state. For our fundraising hockey game, Nancy and her husband Joel take a large volunteer role to help the day run smoothly. It should come as no surprise that in 2018, Nancy accepted the role of Board President at Racker. This position requires a high level of expertise, a great deal of time and someone who leads from the front.



Nancy Malina as Honorary Coach during Racker Rivals Big Red

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nancy stepped up in a very meaningful way. Nancy and her family grasped the financial difficulty that this pandemic caused and made a major gift to the Early Childhood Services of our organization. Having understood the importance of early intervention, Nancy directed her gift to support evaluations for children at Racker. This gift will make a tremendous difference in the lives of children and families at Racker!

All of us at Racker are so thankful for Nancy Malina's leadership and commitment to our organization.

During these challenging and difficult times, finding a light like Nancy means everything. 🌱

25 YEAR CLUB INDUCTEES

2020 marks an important milestone for three longtime Racker employees. Twenty five years ago, three staff walked into the Special Children's Center new employee orientation. These staff have lived through many important stages (and name changes) of our organization, and have had an important part in the growth of the Racker community.

We're very pleased and proud to welcome Betsy Quinlan, Sarah Tarrow, and Claire VanDeusen to the 25 Year Club. These three staff have had a tremendous impact in our Residential Program, Counseling for School Success Program, and Human Resources. Betsy, Sarah, and Claire join 55 other current and former Racker staff that make up the 25 Year Club. Although the difference these staff have made may not be quantifiable, their legacy will continue to impact our communities for a lifetime.

It's no small feat to change the world. Thank you to these great staff, and the whole 25 Year Club, for spending the last quarter century building a world where all people know they belong!

WELCOME TO THE 25 YEAR CLUB! 🌱

DOUG FIRTH OF PRECISION FILTERS DONATES MASKS & PPE

I get by with a little help from my friends. This simple and profound lyric from the iconic Beatles song is so important during these isolating times. Racker relies on donations from our community to help us maintain high quality programs that help people with disabilities. In mid-March our need shifted toward the health and safety of our staff and people in our programs. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York hard, there was very little personal protective equipment (PPE) available to help limit exposure to the virus. Racker's Executive Director, Dan Brown, began reaching out to colleagues and friends in search of PPE to keep our community safe. Enter Doug Firth from Precision Filters. Doug contacted his vendors in China to find KN95 masks, the highly sought-after PPE equipment that was unavailable in the United States. These vendors understood the need and began sending masks for Doug to distribute to Racker and other agencies across the state. On top of his generosity of time and influence, Doug donated over \$18,000 worth of KN95 masks-keeping thousands of essential workers and people receiving services safe. He saved lives in our community and throughout New York State.

During the distribution of masks from Doug's friends from China, he received the picture featured below. A child of one of the vendors drew this picture and sent it with the masks. This beautifully encapsulates the desire to help and make a difference for people of any nationality. It is a mindset that is so simple, and yet resonated deeply throughout our community. Racker is so grateful to Doug for his generosity, and so touched by the thoughtfulness of his friends in China. 🌱



VIRTUAL

Three virtual celebrations held over three weeks



ELEVEN

Racker Employees Honored throughout Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties



SEVEN

Community Members Honored throughout Cortland, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties



REPLAY

Our Three Community Celebrations are available at youtube.com/rackermovies

Just look for the *Racker Through The Years* playlist

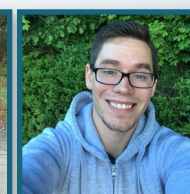
Community Celebrations

Racker's Community Celebrations looked a little bit different this year. We honored important members of the Racker team and the Racker community over the course of three weeks in October. Each week focused on one of our main counties. We spent the week sharing inspirational stories of our award winners on social media, culminating with a live celebration via Zoom. Our virtual celebrations featured speeches from our award presenters and our award winners, as well as highlights of Racker from 2020. In total, 18 individuals were honored. Hundreds of our closest friends, families, and community members tuned in to help us celebrate the great work being done day in and day out by such a great team. 🌱

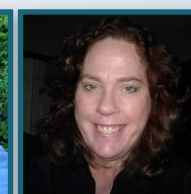
Tioga County



Nicole Whitmarsh
Inspiration Award



Dustin Zimmer
Inspiration Award



Kat Murray
Inspiration Award

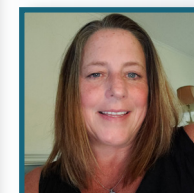


Abbey Hendrickson
Special Friend Award



A New Hope Center
Community Partner Award

Cortland County



Samantha Parker
Inspiration Award



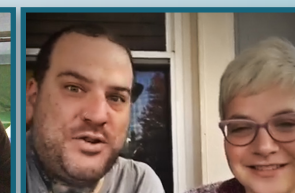
Angela Marsh
Inspiration Award



Marianne Odell
Franziska Racker Award



Dr. Tim Davis/SIMS Lab
Community Partner Award



Thom and Erin Bulman
Special Friend Award

Tompkins County



Austin MacRae
Inspiration Award



Ashley Siegard
Inspiration Award



Dawn Crull
Inspiration Award



Joe Homza
Inspiration Award



Elsie Geno
Mary Hutchens Award



Ethan Carlson
Special Friend Award



Mike Schafer
Community Partner Award



Doug Firth
Special Recognition Award



SELF-ADVOCACY - In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Racker moved forward with their plan to start a self-advocacy group as requested by people served through various Racker programs. Racker started a self-advocacy group for adults with development disabilities hosted virtually through the online platform ZOOM in order to encourage social distancing and safe meetings. The group collaboratively came up with and named the group *Other Voices in the 607*.

The group provided opportunities for several adults across Cortland, Tioga and Tompkins counties who were looking to create friendships, discuss important issues and learn new things during a very isolating time. *Other Voices in the 607* has met weekly since May 2020, and has enjoyed guest speakers who have shared their knowledge of subjects like community resources, health and wellness, and leadership skills. The group members have learned about the history of the self-advocacy movement, established group rules and voted in their first term officers. Some of the members have even branched out and joined local committees on Developmental Disability Services in an effort to enhance communication with various local service providers on important issues impacting people with disabilities. And let's not forget the virtual parties! The group has equal enthusiasm for just getting together to dress up and enjoy a holiday celebration together.

Other Voices in the 607 has exceeded Racker's expectations and has grown into a loyal group of budding leaders in a short period of time. We are excited to see what they will do in 2021! 🌳

To join or learn more about the group and watch their new commercial, please visit www.racker.org/othervoices

RACKER SPEAKER SERIES

Racker Speaker Series: Early Childhood is a workshop series dedicated to supporting the individuals, friends, and families that are a part of Racker's Early Childhood and Clinical programs. This workshop series is offered monthly via ZOOM at no cost for participants. Each month features a different topic presented and moderated by Racker professionals, specialists, and certified experts.

The first workshop featured a topic presented on by Racker Special Education Teacher Katie Bassity, and was moderated by Racker Social Worker Elizabeth Howe. This workshop, titled *S.O.S: Dealing With Challenging Behaviors In The Home* sought to help participants better understand challenging behaviors at home. Participants learned and built upon their understanding of challenging behavior as a form of communication. Following the workshop, participants were able to answer the four following questions:

1. What are children trying to communicate?
2. Can I teach them a better way to communicate?
3. Are there coping skills they can learn?
4. Are there ways for us to change the environment to help them be more successful?



All future workshops in Racker Speaker Series: Early Childhood will be recorded and available at no cost for Racker families, as well as free for the world to utilize. These will be available on Racker's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/rackermovies. Elizabeth Howe states, "All available videos will be meant for general information only and strategies shared must be individualized for each child. Please talk with your child's teacher or therapist for help adapting these strategies to your particular situation and child." 🌳

To find out more information, as well as sign up for the Racker Speaker Series email list, please visit www.racker.org/rackerspeakerseries

RACKER SPEAKER SERIES 2021 CALENDAR (TENTATIVE)

JANUARY

Grief and Loss - *Helping Families Cope with COVID-19*

FEBRUARY

Using Visual Supports to Help Develop Communication Skills

MARCH

Let's Talk Sensory!

Sensory System Differences in Children with Autism

APRIL

Autism Safety at Home & in the Community



When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit earlier this year, everyone involved with Racker had to quickly transition services to a virtual model that made it more challenging to form meaningful connections with others. From Racker staff to people receiving services, it became increasingly important to identify ways to connect socially while isolating at home. One exciting opportunity came about due to the hard work of Ethan Carlson, a talented artist who reached out to Racker about ways to give back to the agency. As a young child, Ethan was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and attended our Wilkins Road preschool, receiving therapy and educational services. He wanted to help others, and worked closely with Marianne Odell, Director of HCBS Waiver Services, on how he could use his skills to enrich other's lives.



Ethan's comic book view during Virtual Art Class

Marianne said, "Ethan was put in touch with me, and we discussed what he was passionate about. When he said art, a light bulb went off. We have people receiving services that love art, and would be eager to hone their skills given the chance. Ethan agreed and came up with a teaching plan. Even though COVID-19 threw a curve ball into our plans of a face to face class,

Ethan was really flexible and agreed to teach virtually. Ethan is teaching Comic Design. This not only encompasses drawing but storytelling as well. Ethan is a very patient teacher, and makes everyone in his class feel welcome and included. From Racker's perspective we are getting this amazing young man sharing his talents with others supporting them with mastering a skill. He's increased confidence, and given others a sense of belonging through a shared passion." We asked Ethan to share about his experience teaching so far:

What was your involvement with Racker as a child?

EC: I was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder by the Racker organization and had received therapeutic help from them at a young age.

What gave you the idea for the art class?

I have been making comic art ever since I was in middle school, putting said comics in both the Racker's magazine and my high school's newspaper. I believed that I was capable of teaching others my craft and I wanted to do so in a way that not only benefits me, but also benefits people with disabilities.

What kind of art are you teaching?

In my class I teach participants all of the basic aspects of comic art, from the simple act of creating square panels, to the complications of speech bubble placement. From there, I allow my participants to create their own comics, providing them with themes and drawing styles as motivation to create something new every class.

What is it like teaching an art class virtually?

Virtual teaching is a very engaging experience. Being a catalyst for creativity feels great, especially in these isolating times.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about the experience?

The connections I have formed with my participants has been astonishing. I would like to thank Dustin Zimmer for helping me make these virtual meetings possible, and to all of the participants who have joined me since its beginnings, especially Oche for being my most dedicated participant. I hope more participants can join me in the future, so that I can share this special environment with everyone at Racker.



Ethan's Christmas Comic

If you are interested in joining Ethan's class, **Comic Book Design**, they meet every Saturday from 5:00pm – 6:00pm. For more information, please check out our **Virtual Activities Calendar** posted every week on www.racker.org/events! 🌳

WINTER 2020

OUTLOOK

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WWW.RACKER.ORG

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Thank you to all our donors and the
Racker family for your support in 2020.

We wish you a
Healthy and Happy New Year!

Racker Champions

Thank you to our Racker Champions who stepped forward to help make Racker Rivals Big Red - The Virtual Face-Off a success!



FINANCIAL DESIGNS



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