

QUARTERLY | SPRING 2021

OUTLOOK Racker

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Supporting People with Disabilities



Ithaca HEARS COMMITMENT TO HEARING

#IGOTTHESHOT
Why Racker Vaccinates

MESSAGE FROM
RACKER BOARD PRESIDENT

COMMUNITY
COMING TOGETHER

ADVOCACY
TWENTY TWENTY-ONE

FROM THE DESK OF Emily Papperman



DEAR RACKER COMMUNITY: Hello! My name is Emily Papperman, and I have the privilege of being the new Racker Board President. For those that don't know me, I am a lifelong resident of Interlaken, NY and I have been working in the disability services field for the last 13 years. I have also been involved with Racker for my entire life, receiving EI (*Early Intervention*) services and attending the preschool as a child and receiving physical and occupational therapies up until I graduated high school in 2003. I really believe that without the groundwork Racker gave me early on, I wouldn't be as healthy and successful now.

Recently, I was asked to share why I both volunteered for the board, and accepted the nomination for Board Chair. The answer to that is simple: **I felt that joining the Board allowed me to both give back to an agency that gave me such great support and care growing up, and provided me with an opportunity to help ensure that Racker can continue to help people with disabilities know they belong for years to come.**



Emily's Graduation from
The Special Children's Center

When I was asked to serve as the current Board President, my first reaction was "Are you serious?" because I generally prefer to smooth the way behind the scenes. I realized that it's also important to continue to make sure that the needs and voices of people with disabilities continue to be heard and championed by our legislators. I also want to work to ensure that those who receive services through any Racker program are continually involved in having conversations and making decisions that directly affect how they receive care and live their daily lives. Accepting the Board President position also gives me a chance to continue to serve alongside the Racker staff to help make that happen.

Racker is important to me because it is led by the incredibly dedicated Board and staff who genuinely care about the people they serve and their families. They are a dedicated, passionate, caring group of people who work tirelessly to fulfill Racker's mission to "envision a world where people know they belong." Racker is important because they fight for their people and they love their community. At Racker everyone is part of a bigger family, and I think that that sense of family and togetherness is more important now than it's ever been in this crazy time. I think Racker is important to the community for the same reason. It continues to promote togetherness, inclusion, and hope for the future, even amid (or perhaps in spite of) divisiveness, chaos and uncertainty.

In Short: Racker cares. About its mission and purpose. About its people. About the community at large. I do too, and I am honored to work and serve alongside them. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to serving and helping in any way I can. Be well! 🌱

Emily Papperman

EMILY PAPPERMAN

President

Racker Board of Directors

WIDESPREAD VACCINATION PROTECTS THOSE WHO ARE NOT ABLE TO GET VACCINATED

Vaccines are not 100% effective, so the more people who get them, the less chance that the virus will be able to spread. A vaccine is not only used to protect you as an individual, it is there to protect anyone to whom you are exposed. The virus can be present without causing any symptoms and can inadvertently be passed on to someone who, in turn, may develop life-threatening and/or life-altering complications.

Dr. Dibble, a psychiatrist with our Counseling for School Success program, recently received both doses of her COVID-19 vaccine. Dr. Dibble explained how she came to the decision to get her vaccine, and why she felt receiving the vaccine was important: "Prior to accepting my vaccination, I reviewed the science. I watched the public forums that were part of the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) process. I consulted with my primary care physician to ensure that I did not have any health concerns that would make taking the vaccine risky. Every eligible health care provider I know has opted to receive a vaccine."

“Getting the vaccine is one of the moving parts to help put an end to this virus! **I want to keep my families safe and continue to support them!**”

JOANIE GROOME (PICTURED LEFT), COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

WHY

#IGotTheShot

RACKER VACCINATES

Racker is a human services organization, serving humans from birth through adult. Many, if not all, aspects of the jobs held by Racker employees and volunteers generally involve face-to-face and hands-on interactions and supports. The pandemic changed the very nature and course of the entire human services field. While Racker's mission to support people with disabilities and their families to lead fulfilling lives by providing opportunities to learn and be connected with others didn't change-the fundamentals of face-to-face and hands-on interactions changed in huge ways for the better part of an entire year.

Racker was fortunate to cultivate a successful and impactful virtual learning solution throughout the thick of the pandemic that ultimately gave birth to new opportunities for support. However, while virtual learning is a great supplement, it's a temporary solution that cannot fully replace the kind of in-person learning that has made the Racker community so successful.

With the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, integral Racker staff are able to get back safely to supporting people with disabilities and their families.

Payton, a physical therapist with Racker said, "I chose to get vaccinated because my kids deserve to feel protected and safe when they are with me. Because I hope that one day soon, the kids I treat can see how happy I get to see them move and excel. And because I want to keep my family, the families of the kids I treat, and the greater Ithaca community safe." Our therapists work very closely with children every day – the vaccine keeps both them and the children safe! 🌱

Melanie O'Leary, Racker Physical Therapist
shares her reason to vaccinate



Ithaca Hears

COMMITMENT TO HEARING



Dr. Monica
Brace Van Houten

In 1993, the Special Children Center's Audiology Clinic opened its doors. The organization's longtime medical director, and later namesake, Dr. Franziska Racker had long advocated for the agency to provide these services. She knew that for many years, children had been sent to institutions because it was thought they had developmental delays when in fact they suffered from undiagnosed hearing difficulties instead. Since then, the Audiology Clinic has been an integral part of the agency's array of services and an enduring legacy of Dr. Racker.

In its early years, the Clinic primarily served children in the Racker preschool or had been referred by Early Intervention programs in the area. Dr. Monica Brace Van Houten joined the Racker Audiology team in 2000. She brought with her an enthusiasm for expanding the Audiology Clinic to see not just people with disabilities within our programs and neighboring agencies, but to open the doors to the community at large. Jody Scriber, retired Director of Clinical and Educational Services, stated that "Monica [brought] new ideas on how to increase our client base and be

“ Monica works with a wide range of people who are interested in improving their quality of life with better hearing. The Clinic has steadily grown with the advances that were implemented by Monica. ”

more efficient in our services. She also worked to develop relationships with hearing aid suppliers and to develop opportunities for the public to learn what is new and available to satisfy the needs of our community. Monica works with a wide range of people who are interested in improving their quality of life with better hearing. The Clinic has steadily grown with the advances that were implemented by Monica.”

Today, Monica's office is busier than ever. Dr. Van Houten has seen the expansion of the Clinic from the single room on Elmira Road to the larger, but shared space in the West End of Ithaca. This space was the home of the Clinic until 2015, when it moved to a new office building. Monica felt that moving to this location on State Street was vital to the growth of the Clinic, to "make a better experience for our patients." Monica and Kim Steiner, Patient Administrator and Audiology Clinic Coordinator, both of whom celebrated their 20-year anniversary with Racker Audiology in 2020, oversaw the logistics of the move to their new space.

With the addition of Kris Lewis, Audiology Clinic Supervisor, and Crystal Garrett, Administrative Assistant, the office runs as a well-oiled machine. And with the continued growth of the Clinic, they are not just a critical part of our constellation of clinical services, but they are also one of the only area providers of hearing aids that accepts Medicaid.

Most recently, Monica and her team have had to adapt to the changes that came on the heels of the COVID-19 Pandemic. When pandemic closures began in mid-March 2020, the audiology team quickly worked to ensure their patients were supported. One key change was the use of telehealth to troubleshoot issues with hearing aids or help people adjust their newly dispensed devices. Kris Lewis, office supervisor, explains that telehealth was completely new to the practice and certainly had a learning curve, but that patients always came first and this was one way they could ensure everyone's needs were being met. Monica explained that "hearing has been even more important to many people during Covid, it's their connection to family and friends."

As the office began to reopen for in-person visits, the team worked on safeguards for both patients and staff. Kim Steiner explained that historically, the office had an open-door policy to troubleshoot hearing aid issues in real time. With Covid precautions at the forefront of everyone's mind this last year, Kim now does a great deal of the triage and troubleshooting for hearing aids over the phone. They've found that many of the issues patients have can be addressed

at home, with the support of office staff. Between phone consultations, spreading out visits to prevent overlapping patients, and thorough health screenings before patients and staff can enter the building, the staff have managed to keep a safe space for returning patients.

The Audiology Clinic has weathered 2020 by being adaptable and putting patients first, and the future looks bright. When asked where they saw the clinic in five years, Monica and Kim were not short of ideas. There are goals to transition to a fully electronic medical record keeping system, but at the end of the day, Monica felt that "If we're still doing in five years what we're doing now, that's a success."

Testimonial

“ Dr. Van Houten was so nice and helpful, and very comforting. ”

I was going back and forth between different audiology offices for a while. The first time meeting Dr. Van Houten in person, I got fitted for my hearing aids. She helped me through the process of learning how to wear them, and helped me understand how to work with my insurance company.

I am a full-time student and also work full time. I've had my hearing aids for about a month, and I can't wait to go back to work with them! When I take my hearing aids off, it's like a completely different world. I didn't know birds chirped or that cats purred, or that an oven makes crackling noises as it's heating up.

Even with the COVID-19 pandemic, Racker Audiology got me in as soon as they could. It's quick and easy when all of the other places I went to before finding Dr. Van Houten were not.

I would recommend Racker Audiology to anyone looking for support, because they helped me get what I needed which makes my life more fulfilling.

There are so many people that are embarrassed about needing hearing aids. I'm not embarrassed at all, as long as I can hear. I can't imagine my life without my hearing aids. ”



607-882-9047
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Monica Van Houten, Audiologist, and Kim Steiner, Audiology Program Coordinator, both celebrated their 20-year anniversary at the Racker Audiology Clinic in 2020. **Congratulations, Kim and Monica!**

COMMUNITY COMING Together



Cortland County, New York

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted friends, families, and communities on a global scale for the better part of 2020. With so much to be unsure about, one group was sure of one thing: caregivers never stopped their important work and they could use some extra compassion in a world full of fatigue. Their official Facebook group states, "Cookies for Caregivers was born as a reflection of the COVID-19 experience in 2020. Many folks continued to go to work and serve their community as others were told to stay home, or were able to work from home. We decided to show our gratitude to those working to serve us by serving them freshly baked cookies as a modest sign of our appreciation and respect."



Since their inception, Cookies for Caregivers has gained interest across the United States with local chapters popping up everywhere, including in Cortland County, New York! In less than two weeks, over forty volunteers signed up to contribute to their goal of recognizing and thanking caregivers in the Cortland area! Because of the dedicated volunteers in the Cortland County chapter, Racker

was recently the recipient of **43 dozen cookies**. Erin McBane Peppel, part of Cortland County's Cookies for Caregivers, stated, "[In just 9 days] 43 people signed up to bake, pack, or deliver cookies! We made our 1st delivery to 8 offices and residential homes at Racker. Our bakers baked 43 dozen cookies to share with workers who have showed up day in and day out to serve others during this pandemic. We thank our bakers, our packers, and most importantly, the staff at Racker! Our Cortland County community is truly amazing!" 🌳



Cookies for Caregivers delivers cookies to Cortland Racker Homes

THE LIPINSKI TRADITION OF KINDNESS AND HOPE

The holiday season is full of traditions. For Steve and Kathy Lipinski, one of their traditions is helping their neighbors and bringing joy to local families. Each year, the Lipinskis create baskets of food, candy and other essentials to be distributed to people in need. They work with Racker staff who help identify families in need, and arrange the basket based on the size of the family.

"We've been doing it for some time, so we've really got it down to a science. We do this to honor our very special niece, Spencer Margaret," said Steve, who puts together an elaborate spreadsheet that outlines various goods and the number of people per family. This year was a little different, as there were more families in need due to the pandemic. The Lipinskis adapted their process and put together even more baskets for our community.

In a year when kindness and hope are in high demand, Steve and Kathy Lipinski continue to show us what is important. Following a basket delivery, one Racker staff reflected: "I spoke with the family this morning and she asked that I pass along their sincere gratitude for the overflowing holiday basket provided before Christmas. She was very emotional and shared how helpful it was for her whole family to have such a generous gift over the holidays. She mentioned how much worry it alleviated. The family was so very appreciative of the generosity."

Many thanks to Steve and Kathy. We are so grateful for your time and generosity. 🌳

RACKER STAFF DONATES GIFT CARD

Every fall, Racker staff support the Tompkins County United Way charitable giving campaign. With each donation, staff are entered into a random drawing to win various prizes. Sally Manning, Racker's Family Navigator Partnership Coordinator, was the winning recipient of a gift card as the result of her contribution to the United Way giving campaign. In true Sally fashion, she donated the card right back to be available for use by the Racker Community. Sally had this to say about the donation,

"My donation of the gift card is the perfect definition of serendipity, synchronicity, the planets aligning perfectly, the gods and goddesses of the world working together and every other goodness that exists in the world coming together!"

Sally and her team had previously set out to share *holiday cheer* of some sort to Racker's Residential Program. While Sally and her team ended up hand delivering Chinese food for a holiday lunch to a few homes, Sally says, "A few days before Christmas, I learned I had won the United Way gift card. Voila! It was my pleasure to make my United Way donation useful twice. I couldn't imagine a better way to pay it forward!"

Thank you Sally for your donation and for spreading holiday cheer and hope to the Racker community! 🌳

ADVOCACY Racker 2021

Last February, a group comprised of Racker staff, board members, families and individuals who receive services visited Albany as part of Democracy in Action - a day devoted to meetings with local legislatures to voice our concerns about budget funding for our programs. Our group convened with thousands of other nonprofits to share our concerns about the 2020 state budget. Democracy in Action embodies the power of the collective voice and promotes advocating for better funding for people with disabilities in New York State. It was a great opportunity for our local state senators and assembly members to hear how insufficient funding affects our community. The Capitol and the legislative office building were filled with passionate people, advocating for a cause near and dear to their hearts.

Fast forward one year, and we are in very different environment where the New York State budget remains uncertain. Racker anticipates cuts in our programs as the state grapples with a \$15 billion budget deficit. This is unacceptable. We intend to use our strong collective voice to fight for our funding, and advocate for the people who receive our services and the staff that support them. Racker needs the voices of our community to stand up. We need passionate community members, staff, families and individuals in our programs to join us in our 2021 advocacy efforts.



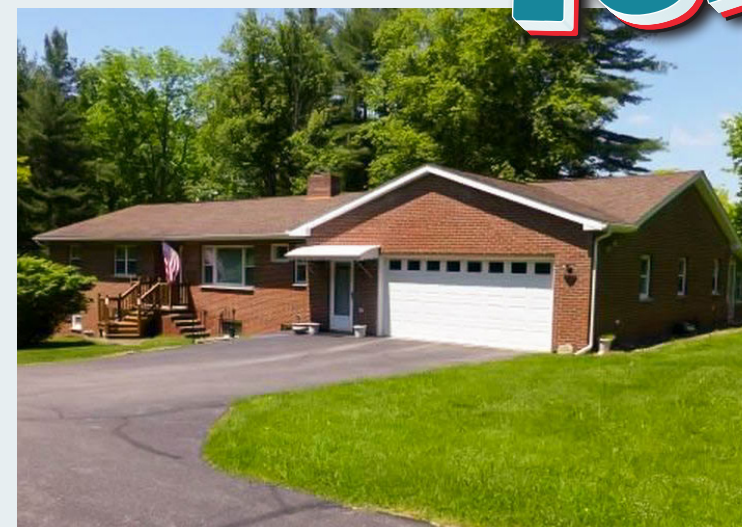
Racker's advocacy team rallying for better wages in Albany • February 2020

Over the next few months, there will be opportunities to share your stories on how a funding decrease would affect you. We will create chances to tell your representatives what is important to you. And we will join the large collective voice of other like-minded organizations to fight against funding cuts to our programs. In the coming days, weeks and months we will be reaching out through email, social media and other formats and asking for your help in our advocacy fight. Please join us and help save the services for people with disabilities in our community. 🌳

To stay up to date on our advocacy push, please visit www.racker.org/advocacy

Racker
Tobey Road
Apalachin NY, 13732

Greetings from
TOBEY road



RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

TOBEY ROAD - We're proud to announce that our newest house to offer residential opportunities just opened in Tioga County! Located in Apalachin, NY, this home welcomes 6 adults with developmental disabilities.

Like many other programs at Racker, opening Tobey Road faced a few setbacks throughout 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thankfully, our talented residential development and facilities team was able to onboard new and existing staff into the Tobey Road home to best support the transition for the new people moving in.

Join our Residential Program to support individuals with developmental disabilities with their daily living activities, creating opportunities to be full and engaged members of their communities.

PLEASE VISIT WWW.RACKER.ORG/EMPLOYMENT TO LEARN MORE

SPRING 2021

OUTLOOK

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3226 Wilkins Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

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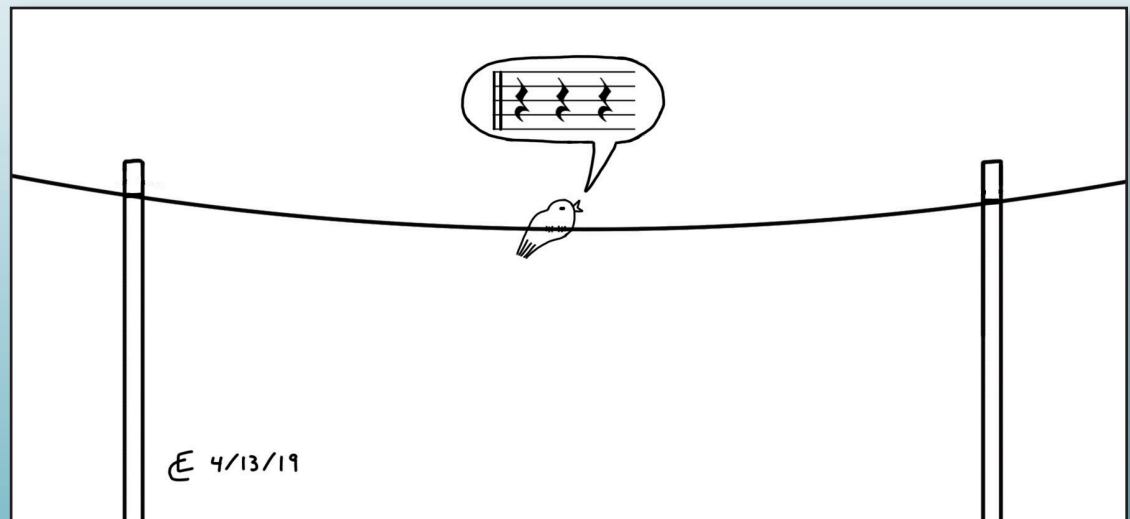
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Ethan Carlson is a student at Ithaca High School. As an individual on the autism spectrum, Ethan sees the world a bit differently than most people. This is especially seen in his cartoons.

Ethan's drawings are purposefully minimalist in order to make readers focus less on the imagery, and more on the humor that is ingrained in it. Many of his cartoons focus on the absurdity of everyday life, while others examine the irony of surreal situations.

In 2020, Ethan started teaching *Comic Book Design*, a class offered as part of Racker's weekly Virtual Activities. For more information, please check out our Virtual Activities Calendar posted every week on www.racker.org/events!

Thank you Ethan for sharing your excellent cartoons with us!



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EDITOR Bob Brazill, Director of Community Relations and Development
DESIGN Joshua Skellett, Creative Content Strategist
CONTRIBUTORS Bob Brazill, Dr. Laura Dibble, Emily Papperman, Joshua Skellett, & Katie Williams

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