

OUTLOOK

Racker 

QUARTERLY | SPRING 2023

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75
YEARS



**RACKER CELEBRATES
75 YEARS OF BELONGING**



CRIS DONOVAN
Executive Director, Racker

Milestone birthdays and anniversaries are such a great opportunity to reflect on successes, lessons learned, and the people and stories that shaped where we are today. This year, Racker reaches its 75th year. Our team has been having a blast taking some time to do some archiving work, pulling older photos and newspaper clippings to be sure they are preserved and available for the next 75 years, and beyond. You can see some of those photos in this issue and in a video, which you can access using the QR Code on page 5.

Also in this issue of the Outlook, we're sharing some stories that highlight our work in the context of the Circle of Courage. We have two stories from our Self-Direction program one highlighting growth in mastery and independence and the other is a fantastic story of generosity. We all experienced a little extra belonging when the Cornell Men's Hockey team came for a visit and we are extremely grateful for the generosity of others through some of the grants we've received to support our different program areas.

Over the course of the next year, we'll be celebrating our 75th anniversary internally and externally. We have a great year planned with events in each of our primary service counties to recognize and honor what brought us here and the countless lives changed by Racker's staff. Please keep your eyes open for your opportunity to be part of our 75th. We can't wait to celebrate with you.

All my best,

PS - While writing this note, I received a package from a long-time friend of Racker along with a stack of photos from his time on the board and pictures of Dr. Racker. What a wonderful gift to open! What were the moments that made a difference to get us to the place we are today? What brought YOU to Racker? What difference have Racker's staff and services made in your life? We'd love to hear from you! Please follow this QR Code to share your stories!

Scan this QR Code to
Tell Us Your Racker story:



CORNELL HOCKEY TEAMS RETURN TO THE WILKINS ROAD PRESCHOOL



The Cornell Men's and Women's hockey teams visited Racker's Gibson Preschool at Wilkins Road. Players spent time with students in our classrooms and gymnasium. Players dressed in their away red sweaters and many students and staff showed their support by wearing red.

Both teams created crafts, read stories, participated in fun activities and made new friendships during their visit. Players took the time to learn more about the programs and services at Racker through a presentation and discussion with our Executive Director, Cris Donovan.

The Men's team have been regular visitors to the Gibson Preschool over the years, but this is their first visit since January of 2020 and we were thrilled to welcome them back! The visit is always a favorite day for children and staff alike.

This is the first time the women's team has visited the preschool. Everyone had such a great time; we are already discussing their next visit and additional ways to continue fostering our relationships with the hockey program at Cornell University.



Thank you to Head Coaches
Mike Schafer
& Doug Derraugh.
Go Big Red!

75 YEARS OF BELONGING

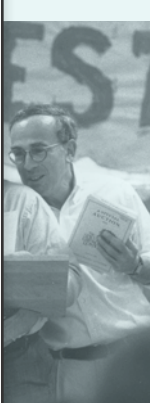


Racker was founded in 1948 by families seeking educational enrichment and social opportunities for their loved ones. Our founding families were dedicated to creating an environment of belonging in an era when very few options existed. Finding common ground with each other, these original families from Tioga and Tompkins counties created the Cerebral Palsy Association of Tompkins County. They started programs and services for local children. We still have the original bank book that contains the record of their first deposit.

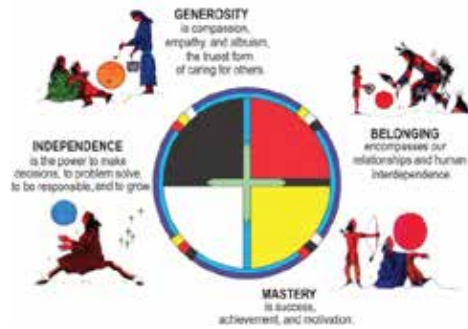
Through the years that followed, our organization remained committed to our roots of providing programs to address community needs. We opened our first clinic in Ithaca in 1949 to provide speech, occupational and physical therapies. If children didn't have transportation, the local Lions Club donated a station wagon to bring them to us. With our focus on the needs of children, the organization was renamed to the Special Children's Center in 1963. During the rest of the 60's, we formed a partnership with the local Elks Club and began providing home service for families. These community partnerships continued into the 1970's when Ithaca College started the swim program that allowed children to receive services and provided the college students with experience.

The 1980's were a decade of growth. In 1980, our agency expanded our preschool program to Cortland and Owego. Two years later, we moved our Ithaca classrooms into the former Glenwood Elementary School on Wilkins Road. These preschools provided an environment of acceptance and belonging- where kids of all abilities learned alongside their peers.

The organization expanded our service offerings in 1988 when we began collaborative partnerships with TST and OCM BOCES to address mental health services for school aged children. Our Counseling for School Success provides educational programs, combined with goals, to help students overcome behavioral challenges that impact their success in school.



Artwork by Lakota artist, George Blue Bird.



Racker continued to expand our program offerings in 1989 when we opened our first residential house in Dryden. Since that time, the demand for residential services has grown and Racker now operates 26 homes throughout Cortland, Tioga and Tompkins Counties.

In 1991, we opened our audiology clinic in Tompkins County, providing hearing services for all people in the community. The following year, our organization began providing Community Habilitation and Family Support services for individuals as they learn to complete a variety of in-home or community-based activities.

As the services we provide grew to meet the needs of students and adults, the name Specials Children's Center no longer represented all the services that we offer. Our long-time Medical Director, Dr. Franziska W. Racker, was a source of inspiration to everyone she encountered. She was the heart of the organization, and the driving force in shaping the organization. She was an advocate for children and their families. Dr. Racker was devoted to the staff and donated her salary to ensure our staff were receiving the latest knowledge, training and techniques so the people in our programs could be given the highest quality of care. Upon her passing in 1999, we named our organization after her, Franziska Racker Centers. Today we operate as Racker and continue her legacy of compassion and creating a world where all people know they belong.

Please scan this QR code to view a 75th Anniversary photo slideshow presentation:



tinyurl.com/2k2jnnavc

GENEROSITY: VOLUNTEERING

Jessie and Megan have been working together through Racker's Self-Direction Program for close to three years. (Although, they have actually known each other for over twenty years!) Through Jessie's self-directed budget, Jessie hired Megan to help her achieve her goals. One of Jessie's personal goals is to give back to others and make a difference in her community. Through her plan and with the help of Megan, Jessie is practicing her generosity!

Jessie's volunteer work has always been important to her. During the height of the pandemic it was challenging, but they still found ways to give back and make a difference. Together they made cards for different holidays and gave them to Beechtree Nursing Center to distribute to the residents. They also made fleece blankets and latch hook rugs which Jessie chose to donate to the SPCA for the animals' cages. When it became safer to be out and about, Jessie and Megan visited with some of the residents at Beechtree Center in person and they played games and worked on crafts



together. They also volunteered for the Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign during the holidays.

For the past couple of years, Jessie and Megan have been active volunteers at The Mary Durham Boutique. Jessie sorts, folds and hangs donated clothes to be sold to support the Women's Opportunity Center community programs. When asked what she likes about volunteering, Jessie said, "I like to make people and animals feel better! I like to help!"

Many thanks to Jessie and Megan for sharing their story! Their spirit of generosity, compassion and empathy, and dedication to helping others are making our world a better place.

GENEROSITY: GRANTS

CP Affiliate Grant

Racker received two grants from Cerebral Palsy Affiliates of New York State to support the people in our programs. These funds disseminated from a larger, statewide grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation that supports the tenets of health.

Racker's residential program received over \$21,000 to purchase AED (automatic external defibrillator) equipment for every residential house in our program. These devices provide another level of safety for our residents in the case of a cardiac incident. Racker's medical director, Dr. Jeff Lewis wrote a letter in support of this grant request:

"Currently, without AEDs, our staff would need to perform CPR, amidst a stressful time period, knowing that immediate use of an AED is more effective than CPR alone in potentiating recovery of someone experiencing a cardiac emergency."

The second grant will outfit Racker's Early Childhood Services Program with tools that support developmental growth for children with disabilities that are in line with their peers of the same age including health, educational, and social milestone achievements. Items included in this funding include tablets for communication, adaptive bikes and a sensory pathway for the Cortland Playground. These

important tools serve as both therapeutic tools and adaptive play equipment for an integrated classroom and play area appropriate for all children to grow, learn, and play together.

Wilkins Sidewalk

Our preschool entrance at Wilkins Road will receive an upgrade and extension of our sidewalk. Thanks to the Tompkins Community Recovery Fund, Racker received a \$15,000 grant award to increase the accessibility for visitors and staff to the main entrance of the building to the preschool entrance. Construction of the sidewalk will begin in the spring of 2023.

Wilkins Atrium

In the summer of 2018, former Assemblymember Barbara Lifton sponsored a grant for Racker to receive \$280,000 through the NYS State and Municipalities (SAM) funding. The pandemic put a pause on that funding until 2022. At that time, Racker was able to repave the parking lots at our Wilkins Road facility. In the spring, we will continue our progress with the funding to renovate the entrance way and overhang at the Wilkins Road preschool. As part of the project, Racker will develop an interior courtyard to serve as a sensory area. Teachers and clinicians will utilize this area for learning and therapy services. These additional opportunities are made possible through a generous donation from a Racker donor. The new courtyard space will honor Nancy Corwin Malina for her dedication to Racker and our students.

Through Community Services (habilitation), Racker pairs trained staff with people with disabilities to build skills. The goals are decided on by the person toward the outcomes they want to achieve. The skills developed can vary widely! Some people choose skills related to their independent living skills; think about things like laundry, grocery shopping or money management. Other people choose to get help to build their mastery in social skills, leisure skills, or safety skills.

For all of us, learning new things, new routines, and gaining mastery and independence are important for our success and happiness across our lifespan! Sometimes we can develop patterns or routines that help us know what to expect and help us be prepared. But sometimes those patterns or routines can hold us back from fully experiencing and enjoying our lives. This was the case for Cassandra, who sought out community supports to help her be more flexible and adaptable to changes in her routines.

Cassandra and her Community Support Staff (CSP), Dalana, have been working together for nearly 7 years through Cassandra's Self-Direction plan. Like many people, Cassandra prefers to know what to expect in her day. This preference could cause her distress if there were interruptions or deviations in her daily schedule. But sometimes change is inevitable and Cassandra got some needed help from Dalana to work on her goal about adapting to changes in her routine.

One day Cassandra was fully dressed and ready for horseback riding. This is hands down Cassandra's favorite activity and something she looks forward to every week! However, when Cassandra and Dalana arrived at the barn, no one was there. This was not expected and definitely a change in Cassandra's expected routine. Cassandra and Dalana waited as patiently as possible for the instructor to arrive. Unfortunately, they soon learned that lessons had been cancelled that week and the communication was missed. Cassandra was understandably extremely upset and disappointed.

Using the skills she learned from Dalana, Cassandra was able to refocus and consider different possibilities for their day. As an alternative, Cassandra and Dalana decided to get French fries and go bowling. See... change isn't all bad! This skill, to adapt to a change in plans, is something that several years ago may not have



been possible. The new and unexpected plan, instead of causing distress, actually brightened Cassandra's day! Cassandra's success in this moment was a great example of her growth, especially in her mastery and independence.

Many thanks to Cassandra and Dalana for sharing their story of success, mastery, and independence!

Did you miss these stories in the Press or on Social Media?

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram & Twitter to stay up-to-date on all things Racker!

Autism Lending Library Reopening

Neighborhood Depot funding from Senator Charles Schumer

Sensory Path Installation in the Cortland Preschool



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OUTLOOK

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OUR MISSION:

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

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