

CHOICES



Fall 2006

President's Corner

Recently, I had dinner with the New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez while meeting on housing and employment issues with Governor Richardson in Santa Fe. I was able to put together a list of questions for him to address as a member of the United States Senate and asked his staff to give me his answers in writing so that I could share them with our readers. Senator Kean sent Community Options, Inc. his responses to those questions as well. It is hoped that this information will give better insight as to how our elected officials view issues confronting persons with disabilities and their families.

Warmest Regards, Robert Stack



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Kara's House ...Becomes Their Home!

Terry Morrison and Nancy Seiler were residents of the New Lisbon Developmental Center, a New Jersey state facility for people with developmentally disabilities. On Thursday, September 7, 2006, the two moved to a two-story home on Old Main Shore Road, far away from the institutional existence both had known for much of their lives. On Friday, September 22, 2006, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held honoring the generosity of Kara Homes, a prominent developer in the region. This home was donated by Kara Homes, who is also donating two other homes in Barnegat and one in Middletown, NJ that have not been built yet.



Featured in Photo: Rob Perotti - Kara Homes, Gregory Fenton - Acting Director, Division of Developmental Disabilities NJ Department of Human Services, Joe Manger - Chief of Police, Barnegat, NJ, James Smith, Joseph H. Vizari - Freeholder, Mayor Thomas E. Hartmen Jr., Nancy Seiler and Terry Morrison - Residents & Official Ribbon Cutters, Diane D'Orazio - Executive Director, Ocean County, NJ & Robert Stack, President & CEO, Community Options, Inc.

To view video of the ribbon cutting visit our newly designed website. Click view movie above contacts (top right on home page).

www.comop.org



Community Options, Inc.

Supporting People with Disabilities Since 1989.

Pittsburgh
Donor

Albuquerque
Building

Wisconsin
Welcomes
Newest Resident

A Garden
Grows in
Brooklyn

Robert Menendez replies to questions

Q. Almost 15 years ago President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, do you think it has been effective legislation?

A. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights statute to “provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.” The nondiscrimination protections for individuals **with disabilities includes all aspects of life including** employment, public services, public accommodations and services operated by private entities, transportation, and telecommunications. This landmark civil rights legislation offers the promise and opportunity individuals with disabilities need and deserve.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court has interpreted the definition of disabilities in such a way that limits the effectiveness of this policy. While I wholeheartedly support the intention of this legislation, I do believe we need to do more. The fact that individuals with disabilities continue to face challenges integrating into society proves that much needed improvement remains, and until Congress improves the definition of the ADA, too many individuals will go without the rights they deserve.

Q. Medicaid relative to the Community Care Waiver and CMS is cumbersome, under-funded and problematic to agencies that support persons with disabilities in housing and employment. What is your vision for improving this system?

NO ANSWER

Q. In most states, there has been a great deal of effort to de-institutionalize persons with developmental disabilities into community based programs. Your state (New Jersey) has over 4000 persons with developmental disabilities in large facilities that are under investigation by the US Department of Justice for widespread abuse and neglect. How do you explain that? What are you going to do to improve that?

A. I recognize that each family has unique needs and deserves to have access to the kind of services and resources that help them care for their loved ones. With that in mind, I do not believe a one size fits all approach is the way to address caregiving services. Instead, I believe we need diversity and choice in allowing families to decide what kind of care works

best for them. When families entrust caregivers with their loved ones, they expect them to be cared for and not neglected. I am very concerned about the facilities in New Jersey that are under investigation, and believe we need to commit ourselves to stopping these injustices.

In memory of a young woman from New Jersey, Danielle Gruskowski, whose life was cut tragically short by a failure to call 9-1-1, I introduced legislation that would require staff working with individuals who have a developmental disability or traumatic brain injury to call emergency services in the event of a life-threatening situation. The legislation, Danielle’s Act, would raise the standard of care by improving staff training and ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities get emergency care when they need it.

Finally, I co-sponsored the Elder Justice Act, legislation to address elder abuse in a comprehensive manner by increasing detection, prevention, prosecution and victim assistance. I believe the principles and intent of this legislation should be expanded to include individuals with disabilities, and am committed to expanding Danielle’s Act by developing such legislation.

I’m proud to be an advocate for individuals with disabilities, and I’m proud to be an advocate for the families in New Jersey who are counting on safe, secure and healthy independent living environments for their loved ones with disabilities.



Robert Menendez during Rush Holts press conference speaking about Danielle’s Law. Danielle’s Law is in memory of a young woman from New Jersey, Danielle Gruskowski, whose life was cut tragically short by a failure to call 9-1-1.

Photo taken June 20, 2005 | Courtesy of Robin Turner, Danielle’s Aunt

Q. New Jersey has received a D- from most educational advocates relative to inclusion and the IDEA statutes implementation. One New Jersey parent said that the “no child left behind should be changed to all children got it in the behind.” From a paradigm shift of “HEAD START” to being left behind, how do you account for New Jersey having the worst record for inclusion for persons with developmental disabilities relative to mainstreaming?

A. I believe we must fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and provide the resources necessary to help all students gain access to a positive education.

Robert Menendez replies to questions

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In addition, despite Bush's promise of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), overall NCLB funding to NJ has plummeted by \$3.8 million in the last 5 years. As a supporter of the goals of No Child Left Behind, I have worked to achieve the promise of this law for our nation's schools by calling for the funds states and school districts need to meet the standards it set. I cosponsored legislation to provide the funds promised by NCLB, improve NCLB to provide schools more flexibility in meeting its standards, develop a pool of talented teachers and expand resources available to teachers, and ensure that students are receiving a quality education.

Until we start funding IDEA and No Child Left Behind, it will be very difficult to address the true needs of all our students. That is why I have been a strong advocate for full funding both of these critical programs, and will continue to wage this fight in the United States Senate.

Q. Over two thirds of all adults with disabilities are under-employed or unemployed. What is your vision for improving their situation?

A. Our society benefits when all citizens are able to realize their full potential. I believe that we must work to improve opportunities for individuals with disabilities to have the freedom to participate in the community by improving transportation, housing and employment options.

Recognizing the importance of public transportation for individuals with disabilities, I fought to ensure that, in the

transportation reauthorization bill, the transit program for seniors and persons with disabilities will receive a 40% increase in funding between 2005 and 2009.

As a member of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, I am a staunch supporter of the Section 811 program, which provides housing assistance to people with disabilities. The national average rent is higher than the average Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payment, so a disabled person receiving SSI benefits is unable to afford housing without substantial supplemental income. Earlier this year, I sent a letter to President Bush urging him to fully fund this important housing program.

In addition, I have worked with Social Security to increase awareness about the Ticket to Work program. This program was designed to support Social Security disability beneficiaries throughout the employment process, and aims to assure that more beneficiaries with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in the workforce. This program was designed to ensure that anyone that decides to go to work will not be penalized for it. Ticket to Work is about providing opportunity for everyone and creating a more inclusive and just workforce.

I believe that together we are stronger, and ensuring all that Americans have access to transportation, housing and employment will make this a truly great nation.

Community Options Inc. is an organization made up of staff, volunteers, and donors. Each individual brings to the organization a unique approach to radically impact the lives of those with disabilities. For Community Options of Pittsburgh, one individual has distinctly stood out – Mr. Paul R. Fleagane. Within a few short months, Mr. Fleagane has paved the way for Community Options of Pittsburgh to raise substantial funds and create organizational awareness within the community.

As we prepared to launch our first annual golf invitational in May of 2006, Mr. Fleagane took it upon himself to sponsor the event and solicit the help of his colleagues to do the same. As our corporate sponsor, he did not golf at the event; instead, he donated his golf foursome to the people we support and spent the day helping to sell 50/50 raffle tickets, mulligans, and enticing golfers to bid on silent auction items. Due to his generosity, our first annual golf outing was a success!

Mr. Fleagane's generosity continues to amaze us. In August, Mr. Fleagane surprised our office by donating twelve tickets to two upcoming Pittsburgh Steeler Games at Heinz Field. Six tickets are for the October 15, 2006 game and six tickets are for the November 5, 2006 game. In Pittsburgh, these tickets are a rare commodity and everyone wants a chance to see the World Champion Pittsburgh Steelers defend their title this season, ensuring that our Steeler Ticket Raffle will be a great success!



These generous acts make a strong impact on our organization. We are grateful for Mr. Fleagane's kindness. **On behalf of the entire Community Options of Pittsburgh team, we would like to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to Mr. Paul R. Fleagane for his dedication to empowering individuals with disabilities!**

Thomas Kean Jr. replies to questions

Q. In most states there has been a great deal of effort to de-institutionalize persons with developmental disabilities in community based programs. Your state (New Jersey) has over 4000 persons with developmental disabilities in large facilities that are under investigation by the US Department of Justice for widespread abuse and neglect. How do you explain that? What are you doing to improve that?

A. I care deeply about the needs of New Jersey's developmentally disabled community, and have worked hard as a member of the New Jersey Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee and as a member of the Board of Advisors to the Office of the Child Advocate to address the issues facing this special needs population.

Clearly, New Jersey must move away from its over-reliance on institutions toward community-based programs. To help move New Jersey closer to this goal, I was pleased to support in the Senate Health Committee and in the Senate new legislation that directs the Division of Developmental Disabilities to prepare a plan to ensure community-based living for some 1,500 individuals with developmental disabilities who want to live in the community and can do so. I was also supportive of Acting Governor Dick Codey's 2005 bond initiative that is already working toward developing permanent supportive housing, community residences and other supportive housing arrangements that offer meaningful alternatives to institutionalization for people with special needs.

I also believe there must be better coordination among State agencies and the Federal government so as to maximize and leverage existing resources and to enable a broader spectrum of residential options to be made available. It has been said that in the past that the State was not maximizing federal reimbursement through the waiver program and, thus, the State was losing out on millions of dollars in federal revenues, as well as opportunities to address the State's growing waiting list. I was pleased to support legislation that now mandates that the State must apply for all appropriate waivers under the Medicaid system to maximize federal reimbursement.

It is always in the best interest of the individual and their family to provide a setting that best meets their needs, and if that includes an institutional setting, then it is incumbent on the State to ensure the best and safest care. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. In 2003, I was proud to have worked with The Family Alliance to Stop Abuse & Neglect members Diane Gruskowski and Robin Turner toward the creation and enactment of Danielle's Law, a law named after Diane's daughter and Robin's niece which now requires that staff serving individuals with disabilities call "911" in the event of a life threatening health emergency. I am also the lead sponsor of Matthew's Law, which if enacted which would prohibit the use of aversives and restrict the use of restraint to emergency situations.

I have also led the call for legislative oversight hearings into the investigation of the most negligent of facilities, and have also sponsored initiatives that have specifically addressed documented incidences at these facilities, including the enactment of a law establishing procedures for admitting individuals to the Moderate Security Unit and legislation that makes it a crime of the third degree to practice psychology without a license.



Tom Kean Jr. worked with The Family Alliance to Stop Abuse & Neglect members Diane Gruskowski and Robin Turner toward the creation and enactment of Danielle's Law. Photo 2003

Q. New Jersey has received a D- from most educational advocates relative to inclusion and the IDEA statutes implementation. One New Jersey parent said that the "no child left behind should be changed to all children got it in the behind." From a paradigm shift of "HEAD START" to being left behind, how do you account for New Jersey having the worst record for inclusion for persons with developmental disabilities relative to mainstreaming?

A. Representing a state that has a powerful state mandate/state pay law, I believe that one of the federal government's most outstanding responsibilities must be to fund federal mandates imposed on states and schools. Increased funding for No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) programs, particularly those for programs designed to meet students with the greatest needs, is necessary. Furthermore, the federal

Thomas Kean Jr. replies to questions

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government must meet its commitment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to pay in full its 40 percent share of the average per-pupil cost of education students with learning disabilities. Having the federal government meet its full funding obligations for NCLB and IDEA would greatly enhance the resources provided to students in need and students with special needs. Last year, I was proud to support in the Senate the establishment of a Special Education Review Commission, which will be looking the delivery, quality, cost and funding of special education services for New Jersey students. I am also working with Senator Ellen Karcher toward passage of Senate bill 223, which seeks to maximize federal financial participation under the State Medicaid program for early intervention services.

Q. Over two thirds of all adults with disabilities are underemployed or unemployed. What is your vision for improving their situation?

A. In a state as dynamic and diversified as New Jersey, there should be opportunities for all disabled residents of our state who are able to work to find jobs where they will achieve a decent wage and benefits, and be able to move toward greater independence. The Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program has created a sound federal model for creating jobs and training opportunities for people who are blind or who have other severe disabilities. However, Congress must consider before reauthorizing the Act to need to reform this program to provide greater accountability for the program and with

greater focus on developing integrated employment opportunities. On the State level, New Jersey should consider, as other states have, ways to incentivize employers to hire and appropriately accommodate employees with disabilities and to assist in offsetting the costs of training and education.

Q. Almost 15 years ago President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, do you think it has been effective legislation?

A. People with developmental disabilities are entitled to the same basic human and civil rights as all individuals, whether they live with family, in the community or in congregate-care residential facilities. ADA can be considered a landmark civil rights initiative in that it set into law for the first time protection against discrimination based on disability. There have been lingering debates over its effectiveness, but the impact that it has made in terms of improving accessibility in terms of public transportation and public buildings has been tangible and meaningful. Both the attention the Act has given to the needs of the disabled community and the resulting modifications to public infrastructure have improved the ability of disabled Americans to live and work in communities across America. As with any piece of legislation, the passage of time brings new perspective to the ADA, and perhaps, the need to update or amend the Act to reflect new sensibilities and awareness as to the issues facing today's Americans with disabilities.

Wisconsin

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Written by AJ Jelks,
Executive Director COI Wisconsin

COI of Wisconsin is pleased to welcome our newest resident, Arnold Dismuke to our 5th Street house. On August 21, 2006, Mr. Dismuke came to us as an emergency placement from Milwaukee County. There was no time for dinner visits or overnight visits. Arnold needed a place to call home, and he has found that with COI. During my initial meeting with Arnold I asked him what his favorite foods were and his favorite things to do. He couldn't tell me the things he liked because there was too much drama that had taken place and he stated that he really couldn't think at



that time. All of the foods he named as his favorite were all junk foods items. I told him that we all eat healthy food at our home. He stated that he could deal with that. After only two weeks, Arnold became a permanent resident. He loves having his own private room, loves the quietness of Oconomowoc, really enjoys helping out around the house, and is having fun with his new peers. The only thing he has to get used to and I quote, "I'm not too sure about all this healthy eating."

Albuquerque

— on the move ...



INTERIOR VIEW

2720 San Pedro Drive NE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87110

Written by:
Gary Marsjanik, Executive Director

On September 11, 2006, the Albuquerque Office closed on a new building for administration and program services. The building is beautiful and will serve the needs of the people we support and staff for many years to come.

Computer Lab Expansion

The Albuquerque office was recently awarded \$6,000 from its mental health funder, Value Options of New Mexico, for the purchase of new hardware and software for its computer lab. The grant will be specifically used for expanding the computer knowledge of the people we support. Whether it be simple internet access or how to compose a resume, the computer lab is available for all of those in need of increasing their computer skills. Thank you to Value Options for this very generous gift.

Picnic 2006

*Jenny Windel,
a person we provide
support to in
New Mexico
holds Sally Quinones
baby Benny.*



*Lawrence Baca & Anthony Montano grill
hamburgers for the Community Options
Albuquerque Picnic, July 10, 2006.*

Tina Martinez & Arthur Perea



Tennessee

Rescue Squad Volunteer

Written by: Robin Carmack
Executive Director Cookeville, TN

David, a charming young man with a lot of energy, has lived with Community Options in Cookeville since 2004. He has adjusted very well since moving into the supported living setting. David decided that he would like to volunteer at the Cookeville Rescue Squad. This is an interest he has had for a long time. He had previously volunteered at a smaller rescue squad in Spencer, TN. when he lived with his parents. David also enjoys camping and going to the lake on the weekends with his staff and friends. We are proud of and happy for David for his accomplishment and contributing to our community.

The Third Anniversary of Danielle's Law

OCTOBER 11, 2006

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL EVENT



Robin Turner & Diane Gruskowski at the 2nd ANNUAL Ride for Danielle's Law | September 23, 2006. To learn more about Danielle and Danielle's Law, visit www.thefamilyalliance.net



Robin Turner Danielle's aunt, Diane Gruskowski Danielle's mother, Senator Thomas Kean, Jr - a Prime Sponsor of Danielle's Law, Grandmother and Robert Stack.



Kara's House ...Becomes Their Home!

Gregory Fenton - Acting Director, Division of Developmental Disabilities NJ Department of Human Services, Robert Stack, President of Community Options and James Smith.



Maxine Blumenthal, Deputy Mayor of Barnegat, NJ, Nancy Seiler and Mayor Thomas E. Hartmen Jr.



Terry Morrison addresses the crowd and thanks the people who made it possible for her to live outside the institution.

To view video of the ribbon cutting visit our newly designed website Click view movie above contacts (top right on home page).

www.comop.org

Community Options, Inc.
16 Farber Road
Princeton, NJ 08540

Creative Services, a subsidiary of
Community Options Enterprises,
designed & produced this newsletter
employing persons with & without disabilities.

www.comop.org

A Garden Grows in Brooklyn

Each year the Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) of Bedford Stuyvesant participates in the national project "NeighborWorks Week". NeighborWorks Week is a project where local housing preservation non profit organizations each year perform projects that foster neighborhood home ownership and neighborhood preservation. This year NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant project was home safety, energy conservation and backyard beautification.

Staff and volunteers of NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant held a street fair on Saturday, June 10, 2006 on the block of the Community Options Van Buren Street Group Home. They selected the backyard of our Home for the "Backyard Beautification" project. With the

aid of a volunteered architect, a design for the backyard was developed. Staff of NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant, COI staff and volunteers toiled for two days to prepare the backyard for the planting. All of the needed equipment, materials, flowers and plants were donated by the NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant. The architect estimated that the cost of such a project would have exceeded \$5,000.

During the day all of the volunteers and staff were treated to BBQ meals by COI staff and residents. Nathaniel, a resident commented they did a great job and he was excited about being able to sit in his back yard and have cookouts this summer.

Community Options is so very grateful to NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant and all those who assisted in growing this garden in Brooklyn.

Reggie Shell, Executive Director of Community Options of Brooklyn is a founding member of the NHS of Bedford Stuyvesant and is happy that they honored him by selecting the Van Buren resident as this year's project.



*Reggie Shell,
Executive Director of
Community Options
of Brooklyn
at the National Golf
Fundraiser sitting
with Griffin, son of
Peter Dulligan,
COI Board Member.*

