

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony to Celebrate
Opening of New Red Ribbon Academy:
Adult Medical Special Needs Program for the 21st Century

WAYNE, New Jersey - On Wednesday, March 27, 2013, at 2 p.m., Community Options, Inc., along with the Parents Group, celebrated the culmination of a goal set years ago with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony presenting the Red Ribbon Academy. The ceremony took place at the new Red Ribbon Academy, located at 506 Hamburg Turnpike, Building 5, Wayne, NJ 07470.

Before the opening of this new program, there were no organizations in NJ that aided adult individuals who have the most severe, fragile, medical disabilities in a way that fosters growth and progress. In 2010, this issue prompted a group of NJ parents to request day support services from the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities. Five mothers who have children with special needs took the lead representing a large group of families of young adults with a myriad of conditions; they named themselves “The Parents Group.”

The Parents Group hoped to inspire the creation of a day program that not only provides support and supervision by highly trained medical professionals, but also allows access to all the benefits of a community-based program, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. At the time, the parents specifically requested that Community Options- a nonprofit that has been providing residential and employment supports to individuals with disabilities since 1989- operate this program. Today, the program is officially up and running and is providing the benefits and supports previously unavailable to this population in New Jersey.

The Red Ribbon Academy embodies the accomplishment of the goal originally set by the Parents Group but ultimately adopted by many more. There were over one hundred people in attendance, including the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Deputy Commissioner Dawn Apgar, who partnered with The Parents Group and Community Options. During the event, she gave a moving speech discussing the efforts of the mothers; “They wanted to be part of the solution not only for their own children but for others as well and I think that is unique. This program represents something pretty significant because we are able to support people who historically might have been institutionalized, who we have had difficulty supporting, people with really complex needs that need a lot of support. Over this journey, I will say, these two years, even though it’s been long, you see the results.”

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Deputy Commissioner Apgar wasn't the only notable attendee. Among others, Wayne Mayor Christopher Vergano attended. Susan Kyrillos also attended on behalf of herself and her husband Senator Joe Kyrillos, both long-time supporters of Community Options and disability awareness. Gail Gordon also came out to offer her support and that of her husband, Senator Bob Gordon. When asked what she thought of the program, Ms. Gordon replied "I met Robert (Stack, President and CEO) when he was on the Transitioning Team with Governor Thornburgh. My husband and I have always been interested in helping those with disabilities. We have become more involved since we chaired the Community Options Cupid's Chase 5K run in Glen Rock, New Jersey. Today is a real hallmark of state of the art technology and the role it plays in helping those with disabilities. This program not only provides excellent care but it also gives the family members an opportunity to take a break. We forget that's important too."

The new medical day program is located in a fully remodeled building tailored specifically for people with special medical needs. The building is completely accessible, has a therapy rooms with special sensory environments for persons with profound intellectual disabilities and medical needs. Individuals will be offered a wide array of therapeutic and recreational activities -within a supervised and structured environment- that maintain and increase mental acuity and maximize their physical ability. These activities will nurture friendships, stimulate interest in life, and provide opportunities for creativity.

The building is outfitted with advanced equipment such eye movement technology, calming lighting effects, an infinity light panel (the only one in the country that is articulated), strip lights for interaction, and many other details to provide a stimulating sensory environment. The technology and science behind the room is extremely intricate and advanced and is difficult to put into place. Linda Messbaur, one of the world's leading experts on Multi-Sensory Environments, said that "Community Options did a great job setting up the electric in the room, they are maybe one of five in the country that did the electric correctly...this is the first room of it's kind that I know of in NJ."

In addition, the program includes vocational and skills training with the goal of improving quality of life through increasing independent skills. The Community Options' Red Ribbon Academy will be open to anyone who qualifies for services under the NJ Division for Developmental Disabilities and transportation will be provided to and from the Academy.

Dawn Apgar left the many attendees with the following sentiment, "Along the way, [The Parents Group] needed someone to carry out [their] mission and it wasn't surprising that they partnered with Community Options, who is really a leader within the state, and the marriage between the Parents Group and the Division and Community Options I think was a really natural one because one of the things that Community Options does best is they listen to what peoples' unique needs are and these parents told us what the needs



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were not only for their children but for others, so there was no cookie cutter approach. I was asked were there other programs like this one but this is a unique program.”

This program would not have been possible without the unwavering determination and dedication of the Parent’s Group, the staff and employees of Community Options, Inc., and a grant awarded by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. in support of the program.

For more detailed press releases about the specific aspects of the Red Ribbon Academy, please visit our media page:

http://www.comop.org/presskit/press_releases.htm

Community Options Inc. (COI) is a national nonprofit organization incorporated in 1989 and headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey. The organization provides residential and employment supports to people with disabilities. The agency philosophy is that all people can and should live and work in the community, regardless of their level of disability. COI currently operates in Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. For more info please visit www.comop.org.

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CEO available for comment. Photos available upon request. If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call (609) 352-5280 or e-mail Kathryn at Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org.