

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Generous Donors Help SJCS Programs Grow

St. John's Community Services is grateful to all the generous donors who contributed to SJCS during the first quarter of our fiscal year 2007. Thanks to you, the services and supports we offer children and adults living with disabilities have become stronger, better and are reaching more people than ever before.

The WACHOVIA FOUNDATION and the CIVITAN CLUB OF TYSONS CORNER have generously supported the expansion of Supported Employment Services in Virginia. With their help and that of other generous donors, SENVA (Supported Employment of Northern Virginia) plans to offer services to 25 additional individuals within the year. Although they live with disabilities such as autism, these new participants will feel the satisfaction of finding and maintaining a competitive job in the community, perhaps for the first time. Wachovia and Civitan are making a real difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in Virginia.

THE ORANGE ORPHAN SOCIETY (a donor for the last two years) and the WILLIAM T. GRANT FOUNDATION have made it possible for the Saturday Recreation and Respite Program in Newark, New Jersey, to increase the number of participating children by 50% this year. Now 45 children and youth between the ages of 5 and 22 enjoy recreational and social activities in community recreation centers, museums, parks and historic sites in the Tri-State area every Saturday. While their families get a much-needed break, these children and young people with developmental disabilities get together with typically-developing children to swim, play games, make art projects and take field trips in and around their own communities. The children and their families have all praised the Saturday Recreation and Respite Program for offering them opportunities to participate in community activities that other children are engaged in every day. Thanks to the Orange Orphan Society and the Grant Foundation for their solid and continuing support.

The BONAVENTURA DEVINE FOUNDATION continues to support four ladies living in Rahweh, New Jersey. The Foundation wishes to help the residents enjoy recreational activities in their home and in the community. Plans are now being made to add a porch to the side of the house where the women can sit in good weather and play games, have lunch and rest. The Bonaventura Devine Foundation is taking very good care of the lucky ladies in Rahway.

In Washington, DC, the children receiving Clinical Services (speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioral evaluation and counseling) have been generously supported by the ALEXANDER AND MARGARET STEWART TRUST (a long-time and generous donor), CVS/pharmacy, and the DC ESCHEATED ESTATES FUND this year. The Clinical Services program makes it possible for children with disabilities to receive needed therapies in their own schools, rather than having to be pulled out of class to go to a clinic or therapy center. These services could not be offered without the ongoing support of donors like the Stewart Trust, CVS/pharmacy and the DC Escheated Estates Fund.

St. John's Community Services is also grateful to all the wonderful people, organizations and businesses that have contributed to our Annual Appeal. The people we serve receive quality care and support year round due to the generosity of our donors. We, the Board of Trustees, the State Boards of Directors, the staff and the people in our programs are very grateful.

Calendar of SJCS Events for 2007

St. John's Sunday	April 15, 2007
20th Annual Pillow Lee Awards Ceremony	April 25, 2007
Spring Cocktail Party (Embassy of Italy)	May 8, 2007
SJCS-TN Awards Ceremony	May 24, 2007

For more information regarding these events, please call 1-800-869-3393.

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*Advancing Community Support and Opportunities for
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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Newsletter of St. John's Community Services

Spring 2007

Care and Advocacy- St. John's Staff Reaches Out

Since its founding 139 years ago, St. John's has been fortunate to attract unique and dedicated staff who devote themselves to bettering the lives of those in society whose voices are rarely heard. St. John's began as a children's hospital in Washington, DC, during the Civil War, evolved into an orphanage, and then began serving children and later adults with disabilities from the mid 1950's. Throughout all the years, St. John's staff has consistently employed caring and innovative approaches to helping others create better lives for themselves.



Virginia staff and consumers march at the rally in Richmond in February.

and DC government officials, resulting in more equitable financial reimbursement and opportunities for individual choice. (See the article below on the conversion of group homes in the District.)

As a Board member for the Virginia Association of Community Rehabilitation Programs (vaACCSES) and active member for The Arc of Northern Virginia, SJCS-VA State Director, Thalia Simpson-Clement, was central to advocacy by both organizations resulting in 5 and 10 percent increases in state funding for Day and Residential Services, respectively.

While the geographical and cultural landscapes and challenges might differ from state to state, St. John's staff adheres to the core mission of *advancing community support and opportunities for people living with disabilities*. State leadership takes an active role in making sure St. John's is "at the table" when it comes to issues affecting the lives of the people we support. Some examples follow.

Through his leadership as President of The DC Coalition for Community Services, SJCS-DC State Director, Arthur Ginsberg, has fostered constructive dialogue between providers

and DC government officials, resulting in more equitable financial reimbursement and opportunities for individual choice.

Andrea Bonaparte, SJCS-NJ State Director, represents St. John's on two major state advocacy and policy-related associations-- The New Jersey Association of Community Providers, Inc. (NJACP) and The Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities (ABCD)-- which advocate for better access to resources for people with disabilities and increased pay and benefits for staff who provide essential support services.

Continued on page 2...

SJCS-DC Leads Way for Change in Residential Services

St. John's has led the way for other service providers in the Nation's Capital by converting three of its group homes to a funding system (Medicaid Waiver) in which the residents make choices about where to live and the services they receive. The process is currently underway for the conversion of another two homes, which will also provide St. John's with more equitable financial reimbursement for the cost of services.

This historic and unprecedented action with the District of Columbia Government represents the culmination of twenty years of advocacy by St. John's leadership. Many of the residents in our DC Community Living Services came to St. John's over twenty years ago from a large District of Columbia institution to live in a smaller home setting. While the Waiver has been used for years by other states, the District of Columbia has only recently begun to support people through this system.

With the support of several district government agencies, most notably the Department of Disabilities Services (DDS), this conversion process for residential services has only been achieved by St. John's. We are hopeful that other provider agencies will be encouraged to follow suit on behalf of their residents. When these conversions are completed at the beginning of May, a total of twenty individuals will have chosen to live in the communities of their choice, consistent with the mission of St. John's.

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Thomas F. Wilds
President

Tom's Message

Another Generation of People Who Make a Difference

I know that paramount to my life at St. John's are the people-- the individuals we support, their families, our staff, and the volunteers who join our noble mission. Generation after generation, St. John's has attracted good, caring people to this growing family. Do we say thank you often enough for their sacrifice, courage and endurance? Certainly not.

If I sound a bit reflective, it's because of the feelings that came upon me as I learned of the recent death of a St. John's staff member. Richard Bligen is the fifth staff person to die in less than a year. These losses of five good men, our friends, have devastated our family. Four of these men belonged to the staff of the District of Columbia: Richard Bligen, Peron Williams, Thomas Capps and Hassan Bangura. Sekou Bonar was a New Jersey staff person. We loved all of them and will miss them

deeply. They were quiet leaders in our constant drive to enhance the quality of life for those in our community who are often neglected or forgotten. While each loss was equally difficult and each person equally valued, let me share just one short life story so you better understand our caring and loving family at St. John's, so we don't forget the courage, sacrifice and endurance of those who fight daily for the equality of our citizens with disabilities.



Richard Bligen
July 8, 1968 - March 19, 2007

Richard Bligen, who died on March 19 from a brain tumor, was only 38 years old. Richard was the gentlest, most thoughtful person you could hope to encounter. He had a large circle of family and friends, a partner who loved him, colleagues at St. John's who cared for and respected him, and individuals and families he supported who deeply

felt his personal affection. At the memorial his mother said she simply had no idea that so many people loved her son.

Richard was with St. John's-DC as a Behavior Manager for five years and received the 2004 Employee of the Year Award. He had a distinguished academic career, earning his Master's degree from North Carolina Central University in Durham, NC, in 1996. Richard was especially proud that his clinical skills for self-injurious behavior made a significant difference-- enhancing the lives of so many. Richard lived a life of many passions, one of them cooking culinary delights from around the world and sharing these dishes and cultural traditions with others. As a parting gift at his memorial, Richard's partner gave away his collection of cookbooks. I have mine and will cherish it always.

I know that at St. John's we have some of the most caring, thoughtful, and loving people. It's a large part of our heritage-- collecting good people generation after generation for the past 139 years. I am grateful to know each and every one of you and grateful to share our mission with you on a daily basis.

Advocacy continued...

Julia Bratcher, SJCS-TN State Director, serves as a Board member for the Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO), which has been instrumental in attaining increases in the state budget for provider services, staff salaries and benefits. (See story on page 3 on the deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities in Tennessee and the role played by St. John's to support some of the affected individuals.)

SJCS-PA State Director, Dr. Albert Brown, leads state and local efforts by serving on the Board of the Pennsylvania Association of Resources for People with Mental Retardation (PAR), and with the Philadelphia Transition Project, supporting individu-

als who are transitioning from school to work.

In addition to leadership activities with associations and organizations, staff advocate for individuals with disabilities they support on a day-to-day basis. Many St. John's staff members to attend rallies and contact state legislators to raise awareness and support changes in legislation and budget priorities. But equally important, direct care staff serve as the "eyes and ears" for St. John's by helping to create opportunities in the community for the individuals they support. For example, staff:

- Identify possible supported employment positions when shopping and

visiting stores in the area.

- Discuss volunteer opportunities when visiting with staff or volunteers working with other non-profit services.
- Acquire free or discounted tickets for individuals to enjoy special events, such as the circus, athletic games, amusement parks and concerts.

Staff efforts are relentless and powerful weapons to help gain access to adequately funded, community-based services. St. John's is grateful to staff members for their on-going commitment to supporting people striving to fulfill a life of their choosing.

St. John's-Tennessee: A Story of Tenacity, Advocacy and Service

The story of St. John's-Tennessee (SJCS-TN) is an example of how St. John's reaches out, even in trying circumstances, to serve individuals with disabilities in need of our services. SJCS-TN was invited in 1999 by the State of Tennessee, Division of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS), to begin providing services in the western region of the state (Memphis area). A number of the individuals joining the St. John's family had previously lived at the Arlington Developmental Center, a state run facility. Soon thereafter, DMRS was placed under moratorium by the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS) for violations of standards of care, curtailing possible growth for a four year period. Nonetheless, St. John's provided services even while incurring considerable financial losses.

The Arlington Developmental Center had opened in 1974 with 673 resi-



A SJCS-TN service recipient smiles outside his home.

dents living in deplorable conditions. (St. John's had faced similar situations for many years in the District of Columbia, and later in other states.) Sued by the US Department of Justice in 1992 for a series of civil rights violations, Arlington was placed under the oversight of a Court Monitor. One of the requirements of the settlement agreement reached in January 2007 was that the facility be closed within three years. In addition,

settlement agreements pertaining to two other state centers and people languishing on state waiting lists are now pending.

From 2004 to this current time, the number of individuals supported by SJCS-TN has expanded from 10 to 21 in Jackson and 18 to 24 in Memphis. St. John's has an opportunity for growth in the Memphis area and in some of the rural counties of West TN, in part due to the remaining people in Arlington ready to move into community-based settings.

Much to the credit of State Director Julia Bratcher and her staff, SJCS-TN has received the elite "Quality Tier" group status for five of the last six years, a designation required by the state for institutional referrals. As with all St. John's state programs, growth can only occur if we retain high quality and adequately funded services.

Industry Insight

AAMR Changes Name to Appropriately Recognize People with Disabilities

As of January 1, 2007, the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) changed its name to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). As the foremost international organization representing professionals worldwide serving people with disabilities, this change reflects a new standard in disability terminology and advances made in addressing people with disabilities in respectful and socially acceptable ways.

Hank Bersani, current President of AAIDD explains: "Intellectual disability is a more accurate and modern term, and is also in keeping with terminology in

Europe and Canada. We want to move away from any use of the word 'retardation,' while still allowing educators and other professionals to accurately describe the needs of the people they serve. Further, with the new name, we are reminding our members and the public that our mission has long included people with various developmental disabilities" (AAIDD's November 2, 2006 Press Release).

AAIDD's name change has received overwhelming support from the professional community and people living with developmental disabilities. Most members of AAIDD, such as St. John's Community Services, work closely with

people with developmental disabilities, such as autism and Down syndrome, which often coincide with an intellectual disability.

As with past changes that have taken place in the use of appropriate terminology to describe individuals with disabilities, the process will be evolutionary and educational. Our responsibility at St. John's is to educate others about the use of the most appropriate language to describe individuals' conditions or circumstances. We must also continue to instill in others an understanding of the dignity and worth of each individual that the words attempt to define. Please join us in this effort.

In My Own Words...

Honoring Monique Simms-Romano and Molly Voss at New Jersey's Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance Clinic, Inc. (DDHA)

"DDHA has a quick response to 'emergency' appointments and has improved its communication greatly since we have started working with them. The staff is familiar with the disabilities population and standards and is willing to come to the group homes to train St. John's staff. They are a very necessary part of our program." -Andrea Bonaparte, State Director-NJ

Monique - Before coming to DDHA in 2000, I had previous experience in public health as a visiting nurse with Community Nursing Services. I obtained a Master's in Nursing from the University of Medicine and Dentistry, and I am board certified as a family nurse practitioner.

Molly - I earned a Master's in Nursing from Rutgers University, New Jersey, and I am certified as an adult and geriatric nurse practitioner. I have been in nursing for the past thirty years, and I have a strong background in home care as well. I worked for Virtua Home Care in New Jersey before starting my career with DDHA in 2000.



Monique Simms-Romano and Marie Perez share a joke during an exam.



Molly Voss prepares to give Barbara Quesada a check-up at DDHA.

DDHA is unique because all the offices have nurse practitioners. As Advanced Practice Nurses, we are trained to view the patients holistically and have frequent interactions with other disciplines that benefit our clients. We provide primary care, primary mental health, and primary neurological care and care management. DDHA is excited about opening our sixth office across the state in New Brunswick. Working with DDHA allows for a great deal of independence and we enjoy interacting with the clients. Most of our clients are more like family-- we are able to spend quality time providing services and getting to know our clients.

St. John's staff interacts with us often. We review charts and provide needed support for their group homes. The agency is very responsive to the needs of the individuals it serves; they have lots of challenging individuals, more than some of the other agencies we work with. The staff is very good at maintaining these individuals and interacting with us on questions or concerns about their care.

PASE Participant Sets Example for Others



When Thomas Offenbach joined the St. John's family in Pennsylvania in 2005, he had been working with the Naval Defense Center in Philadelphia two afternoons a week for ten years. His duties included vacuuming, emptying the trash, and cleaning windows.

With the support of his SJCS-PA Employment Specialist, Charles Mitchell, Thomas took on a second job with Taco Bell for three mornings a week after coming to St. John's, and

maintained his job at the Naval Defense Center. As the Dining Room Captain at Taco Bell, Thomas was responsible for emptying trash, mopping and cleaning bathrooms, and cleaning windows. According to Thomas, his greatest success was taking on more responsibility and being able to interact regularly with the customers.

Subsequently, Thomas chose to leave his Taco Bell job so that he could dedicate five afternoons a week with the Naval Defense Center. Because of his dedication and hard work, Thomas has become a valued employee for this government agency and has earned a substantial pension from his years of employment. He gets along well with the staff employed at the Naval Defense Center and takes particular pride in keeping their work areas clean.

Thomas is a hard working individual, and he loves and takes pride in the work he does. In addition, he has been able to save money from his salary to pay for special occasions, such as a trip he took to Disney World last year.

His past and present Employment Specialists have the greatest respect for all that Thomas has achieved. As stated by Charles: "Thomas recently left the workshop which he has attended for over ten years to go full-fledged into the workforce. He has kept a job with the government for over ten years and is doing very well. All of the customers like to see him every day; Thomas is a role model for customers with disabilities who come in there."