

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Elizabeth Martin

January has been an eventful month for our agency. Let's start with the most exciting news: We have a new partnership with Russell Sage College that will allow us to continue to provide The College Experience Program! When we learned that The College of Saint Rose would be closing, we immediately began the search for a new host college that would not only preserve the wonderful things we love about the Program, but also allow it to prosper. Our students will now have access to not one, but two campuses, providing even more enrichment opportunities. I am thrilled by this new partnership, proud of the team and the students for their ability to pivot with excitement, and confident that Russell Sage is the perfect new home for our Program.

Now for the not so exciting news: Governor Hochul recently released her proposed FY 2025 budget and to say I am disappointed is an understatement. The Governor's spending plan contains ONLY a 1.5% Cost-Of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) and NO funding for Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) for our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). 1.5% is less than half of the inflationary rise over the past year and the costs of providing our supportive services have only continued to climb higher and higher. In order to keep up with inflation, and pay our DSPs what they deserve for the life-enhancing work they provide, it is vital that we continue to advocate for a 3.2% COLA and a DSWE to strengthen our workforce.

The time to speak up is now and we must make our voices heard!

As New York State Senators and Assemblymembers begin work on their One House budget bills, we must demand that they do what the Governor did not. There is strength in numbers. Please join us in sending a clear message to our lawmakers, that human connection and quality supports are vital in the I/DD community and we deserve fairness when it comes to funding. We appreciate your partnership in this fight. Please take a moment to call or email your state lawmakers to share your support. [Click here to reach out NOW!](#)

Over the next two months, we will be spending a lot of time at the State Capitol, rallying, conferencing, lobbying, and meeting with representatives from across New York to advocate for additional funding. Please plan to join me at the State Capitol on Monday, February 12 at 11:00 am as we gather together to advocate for additional funding support.

One voice may not be heard, but when our voices join together, we can change hearts. I hope to see you there!

NEW YORK
**DISABILITY
ADVOCATES**



Join us for a rally!

Monday, February 12
11:00 AM

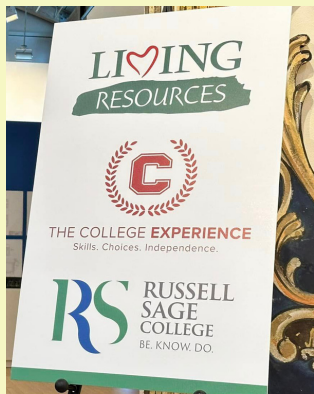
**New York State Capitol Building, War Room, 2nd Floor
State St. and Washington Ave., Albany**

Show lawmakers you support investment in the
I/DD service sector by wearing orange!

**INVEST IN
ME!**



RUSSELL SAGE COLLEGE SELECTED AS NEW PARTNER FOR LIVING RESOURCES' THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE PROGRAM



Excitement and emotions were high in the Opalka Gallery at [Russell Sage College's](#) Albany campus as students in The College Experience Program prepare to embark on the next chapter in their academic journey.

The announcement is official! Living Resources is partnering with Russell Sage to preserve, strengthen, and grow our College Experience Program long into the future.

After the College of Saint Rose suddenly announced it would be closing at the end of the Spring 2024 semester, efforts immediately began to find the best possible new home for all of the learning, achievements, and lifelong connections that The College Experience Program is known for. All of those involved agree that Russell Sage is a perfect fit and melding of our philosophies, mission, and values.

“It was heartbreaking when we found out that the College of Saint Rose was closing,” shared CEO Elizabeth Martin at the podium during the official press conference, “The feeling of loss for our graduates and for our students was unimaginable. However, that closure opened the door to a fabulous new partnership with Russell Sage, as our host college for this program. I’m looking forward to many, many years of us working together.”

“The College Experience aligns perfectly with the Russell Sage mission of ‘Be. Know. Do.’ Together, we provide opportunities for individuals to reach their goals in a supportive environment, while enjoying a range of experiences,” said Russell Sage Provost Theresa Hand, “We are excited to have the students, their families, and the greater Living Resources family join us this summer and add their energy, experiences, and perspectives to our college community.”



A signing ceremony followed remarks, with current College Experience students welcomed to the podium. Each student was wearing a new T-shirt emblazoned with the Russell Sage mascot or logo, signaling the start of a new era in their learning process towards independence and personal accomplishment. The students were then ushered over to the many members of the media, to do interviews for television broadcasts and newspaper articles. They represented their program well, giving knowledgeable and personal responses to questions about their experiences in the program and the upcoming changes they are facing.



When asked by a reporter how he felt, Rohan shared that he was very excited, although it all made him a little nervous. He said, "I'm very excited to have this new opportunity." Douglas Morrissey, father of College Experience senior Samantha shared that he was impressed with how hard the staff worked to make this happen in such a brief period of time.



After all of the questions were answered, the students zipped up their coats and joined a Russell Sage tour guide to get the lay of the land at one of their two new learning grounds. Russell Sage has campuses in both Albany and Troy, which will afford our College Experience students with a wonderful opportunity to immerse themselves in two very different Capital Region cities, which College Experience Senior Admissions Coordinator, Kristin McInerney sees as a bonus. She added, "I can see them fitting right in. I'm very excited."

Living Resources' Director of College Programs, Colleen Dergosits, agreed, adding "Not only will our students will be welcome here, but our programs will bring a great opportunity to the Russell Sage community." Living Resources Associate Executive Director for Programs, Jennifer Richard said, "The mission of the college aligns so well with our mission here at Living Resources. We know our students will only add to the wonderful college experience for all."



The tour took students down hallways, into libraries, past fitness centers, into a gym and through a dining hall. Grace, a College Experience senior turned to one of her instructors and remarked that offerings at the dining hall looked even better than what The College of Saint Rose had to offer! The mood of students was largely bittersweet. They shared their excitement at starting a new chapter, but also their sadness at having no choice but to leave The College of Saint Rose behind.



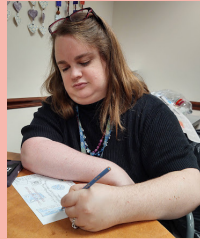
This transition is a major milestone for The College Experience Program, which has been operating since 2005, when it began with an initial class of four students with intellectual or developmental disabilities who wanted to pursue higher education, just like their peers and siblings. Fast forward to today, the Program has graduated 200 students and will continue to grow with this new partnership. 97 percent of College Experience graduates are living independently and 87 percent are employed. The Program currently supports 55 students, who live in our 10 Albany-based dorm houses. The students will take most of their classes on the Albany campus while using the college shuttles for additional experiences on the Troy campus.





COMING TOGETHER TO PREPARE A VITAL VALENTINE'S DAY MESSAGE

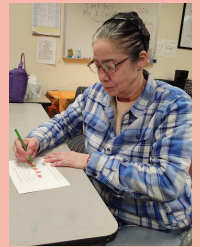
Individuals across multiple Living Resources programs are coming together to tell New York State lawmakers that added investment in the I/DD community is needed in the final version of the FY 2025 State Budget. Our organization plans on sending that important message in a very creative way.



The Development Department designed and printed Valentine's Day cards, emblazoned with the message "Share the Love with the I/DD Community this Valentine's Day." The back was largely left blank, aside from phrases like "Show our DSPs some LOVE," "Invest in my future so I can keep growing," and "No U-Turns on the road to MY Independence!"



That's where our Arts Program and Brain Injury Program took over. They filled the blank space on the back of the cards with beautiful, original artwork. Using the phrases printed on the cards as inspiration, they crafted drawings and wrote personal messages to lawmakers about just how important the programs they attend are and why they feel more funding should be budgeted to increase wages for the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in their lives. Their creativity truly brought the messages to life with a personal touch.



To make the hand-drawn cards extra memorable, each is being paired with a small, heart-decorated bag full of mints and Hershey's kisses. That's where the might of the Day Community Opportunities Program came in! 15 participants from Albany, Rensselaer, and Schenectady Counties came together to count out the candy, bag it, and tie the drawstrings. Many of the participants remarked how much fun they had volunteering and working with one another in a group effort.

Over 200 bags and cards were prepared in total, one for each New York State Senator and Assembly member. This is no small feat, but when members of the Living Resources family came together and everyone focused their personal talents and skills towards a common goal, each piece of this advocacy initiative came together seamlessly. The next step will be to hand deliver the cards and the candy to the legislators' offices in February.





GREATER INDEPENDENCE THROUGH VIVALYNX TECHNOLOGY

We have a new, innovative tool in our resource toolbox to enhance our mission of supporting and empowering individuals with disabilities to live with dignity, independence, and happiness. It's called VivaLynx!

“Many individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities desire the freedom that comes with independent living. While the transition is exciting, it can also be intimidating. Originally designed to help seniors age in place, VivaLynx technology can empower individuals to take the next steps in their independence journey,” stated CEO Elizabeth Martin.



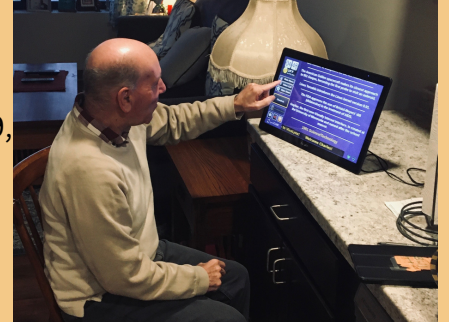
Participants can customize their tablets to reflect their personal needs, including work schedules, doctor's appointments, taking vitamins or medications, and even family life events such as birthdays and anniversaries. Karen Wolff, Operations Manager of VivaLynx said, “Wouldn't you rather be reminded to brush your teeth by technology than to have a staff member tell you? With VivaLynx, when a task reminder comes up, the participants can perform it independently and mark it off as done.” In this way, Karen sees VivaLynx as a tool which allows each individual to become their own “Chief Wellness Officer.”

In addition, one touch video conferencing connects individuals with staff, doctors, family members, and each other for 24/7 support. Optional cameras, sensors, and biometric screening tools can provide immediate alerts if something is out of the ordinary or there is a crisis situation, allowing staff to assess potential emergency situations and intervene instantly.

In order to provide a smooth system roll out, Living Resources staff were trained and began practicing with the VivaLynx enabled tablets in December. The first individuals excitedly received their tablets on January 9, 2024, expressing enthusiasm about this new tool and the increased independence it represents.

Emily is looking forward to being healthier and more organized. She also hopes that it will help her better visualize her budgeting. Michael sees it as an opportunity to learn many new skills and Joseph is optimistic that it will help him keep track of his medications, doctors' appointments, and schedules. Debbie agreed with the other individuals, saying that the new system was “pretty cool!”

Director of Community Living, John Breitenbach said, “We are very excited that our participants have the opportunity to engage with this progressive technology. It is our hope that VivaLynx will help the individuals we support reach their goals for independent living while optimizing staff resources.”





IN LOVING TRIBUTE

Thank you for honoring your loved one(s) with a donation to our organization. We deeply appreciate your generosity!

In Memory of Ann Giovannetti
Barbara & Jim Malerba

In Honor of the Arts Program
Susan Lum Creitz and Toby Slyman

In Honor of the Avidon Family
Ross Avidon

In Memory of Louis J. Bonan
David Capka
Vincent Capka and Mary Bonan

In Honor of Ed Brennan's Bike Ride
Patrick Saum

In Honor of Luann Brennan
Pat Brennan

In Memory of Bob Brown
Shane and Betsy Gilchrest

In Memory of Salvatore Casano
Margie-Alice Reyes
Cynthia Troischt

In Honor of The College Experience Program
Jamie and Patrick Masson

In Honor of Maureen Conboy
Stephen and Karen Appe

In Honor of Alex Corvino
Ralph and Jeanellen Corvino

In Memory of Steve Couse
Barbara and Patrick Adams

In Honor of Katie Curran
Laura Blumenthal
Kelley & Vince Curran

In Honor of Reed Grontas
Brenda Szydlo and Robert White

In Memory of Stephen M. Iavarone
Betty Albright

In Honor of Judi Lodato
Shane and Betsy Gilchrest



In Honor of Christopher Long
Traci Cornwell and Kaylle Tedesco

In Honor of Lynne Long
Shane and Betsy Gilchrest

In Memory of Eileen Lucey
Sandra Bourassa
Ginger Conti
Mary and Stephen Ippolito Laing, Sandra, Kelly, and Karyn Kennedy
Judy and Walter Kowalik
Paul Lemire
Timothy Lucey
Elizabeth and Jason Martin
Eileen Ming
Patty Mueller
Ken, Kathy, and Sara Orleanski
Sharon Quinn
The Rauch Family
Michael Pratt
Richard and Suzanne Self
Enrica Solari-Perlstein
Leslie Stein Lloyd

In Memory of Frances Rasmussen
Marilyn Arents
Jim & Karen Carter
Janet Haber
Richard Miller
Toni Petrizzelli
Michael and Patricia Reilly
David Rasmussen

In Memory of Charles D. Rasmussen and Gary Kent Haber
Sigmund and Abby Balaban

In Memory of Irma & Harry Weiss and Peter Razanousky
Lisa and John Razanousky

In Honor of Dan Ritzenberg
Aaron Ritzenberg

In Memory of Amanda Rivenburg
Ted and Dolores Correll



THANK YOU TO OUR HOLIDAY CAMPAIGN DONORS

Betty Albright
Beth Ames
Albert and Dolores Bonan
Vincent Capka and Mary Bonan
Joan and Stephen Coffey
Eastern Heating & Cooling
David Geisinger and Sandra Staples
Geisinger
Mayor Gerald D. and Mary Ann Jennings
Darlane and Sally Kipper

Catherine Merriman
Lee and Sharlene Raymond
RBM-Guardian Fire Protection, Inc.
Darius Shahinfar and Noelle Kinsch
Tom and Johanna Stebbins
Dr. Richard J. Steitzer and Kimberly Steitzer
Denise Stewart
Congressman Paul D. Tonko
Susan Williams

We appreciate your support!

For a list of donors who gave earlier in the campaign, [click here to view December's newsletter!](#)



ROLLING IN THE DOUGH

When the folks at Site-Based Day Habilitation in East Greenbush realized they had extra supplies left over from weekly cooking group, they knew just what to do! They went around the building and asked if anyone wanted to make cookies and James, Corey, Nicole, Danny, Ace, Tracy, and Miguel all happily agreed to take part in this fun activity. After the volunteers put on their gloves, they got to work, rolling out the dough and placing it on baking sheets.

They made enough sugar and chocolate caramel cookies for everyone in the building to have one. "They were excited," shares Deborah Stanfield, Assistant Manager at the site, "Who doesn't like cookies?"

At Site-Based Day Habilitation, efforts are centered on enriching individual's lives and helping them achieve their goals. Recreational activities, like cookie making, are focused on fostering community inclusion, social integration, individuality, and productivity.



RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

Our Brain Injury Program kicked 2023 to the curb in style! Decked out in the paper hats and tiaras they were ready to celebrate the arrival of 2024.

Music was played, refreshments were served, and at noon, a ball drop from a prior year was played on the big screen! Everyone counted down and cheered while enjoying a grape juice toast. The festive celebration was the perfect way to cap off a year's worth of friendships, creativity, and personal growth!





DANCING WITH DELIGHT



Participants in the Rensselaer Day Community Opportunities Program (DCOP) are stepping, twisting, and grooving into happiness by taking part in a monthly class at Fancy Feet Dance Studio in Troy!

It started with an idea from Amanda Doty, Manager of Rensselaer DCOP. “I had posted on a few local Facebook pages a few months back, looking for sites and activities for our participants,” she explains, “Amanda Durst, the owner and director of Fancy Feet reached out to me and offered to do a dance class, free of charge, once a month.”

Participants have shared nothing but glowing reviews from their first few sessions. “I watched as Amanda Durst taught them with kindness and patience,” shares Amanda Doty, “I watched the participants try their hardest to pay attention and follow her lead. It was an amazing thing to see.” She says one participant came up to her and said “I’m so happy to be doing dance class!”

“At Fancy Feet Dance Studio we believe that dance is for everyone, says Amanda Durst, “We provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for all dancers to creatively express themselves. The benefits of dance are many- from building coordination, strength, and cognitive abilities, to building overall confidence, socialization, and having fun! Fancy Feet is delighted to be able to host these dance classes with The Living Resources community.”

The smiles on everyone’s faces and the joy on display through their moves tell the whole story. We thank Fancy Feet Dance Studio for partnering with us to make this class happen!



[Click HERE to read December's Newsletter](#)