



Creating Opportunities for Happy Lives

THE EEDA READER

WINTER 2023



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A Proud Affiliate of Kinexion



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A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EEDA

LISA MEYER FERTAL

EEDA has completed a full year since our affiliation with IGHL on January 1, 2022. The affiliation positions EEDA as part of a large network called Kinexion. The Kinexion network serves as the Management Service Organization (MSO) for the seven agencies in the affiliation: IGHL, The New Interdisciplinary School, The Center for Developmental Disabilities, Angela's House, Maryhaven, Head Injury Association, and EEDA. Currently in the network, we have centralized finance, information technology, purchasing, maintenance, leadership in fundraising, compliance, and human resources. The Kinexion network employs over 3,500 staff members and supports 5,000 individuals with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities with a collective annual budget of over \$250,000,000. These are powerful numbers in our industry and our goal has been to position the EEDA organization to best transition to a managed care system with access to robust departments that will streamline processes, recognize financial and resource efficiencies, and create centers of excellence.

EEDA is proud to be part of this groundbreaking business model in New York State. Bringing seven organizations together in one year has been no easy task. The executive staff from the affiliate agencies and the network have worked tirelessly to support, collaborate, and plan network development. In an affiliation of any size, there are resources and efficiencies that allow you to recognize savings and others that add cost. There are some processes you support and others you disagree with. EEDA has been challenged by some of these changes, so it's important to keep the team focused on the long-term goals mentioned above as I believe we will accomplish them and be happy with the results. Additionally, three of our board members are representatives on the Kinexion board and we have an active advisory committee comprised of former EEDA board members who are responsible to relay any concerns to the newly enacted network board members. We are learning together, discussing challenges openly, and celebrating every success.

We have established diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) learning throughout the network, which is our first initiative to engage all affiliates. We contracted a consultant, Alan Richter, PhD, who has done DEI work for thirty years. Dr. Richter is helping us understand DEI and focus on key components of long-term integration and plan steps to immerse the whole organization in this learning opportunity. This has been a really good experience and we hope by creating a learning organization that leads with DEI, we will support employee retention, attract the best talent, and leverage the respect we have for one another, understanding all perspectives make our organization stronger. This is important work in our community and the world today.

What has not changed over the year are our programs or the way we support people. We continue to struggle with workforce vacancies, but we still provide services that strive to enhance the lives of others. EEDA's core team is made up of over 700 remarkable people who believe the work they do matters, so they put everything they have into it. If this describes you or if you know someone who cares about our mission, ask them to come join us, because the work we do really does matter since we support very important people in partnership with their families and our community. I can't thank the EEDA staff enough for the work being done every day throughout the year. They truly create opportunities for happy lives.

Lisa Meyer Fertal



A MESSAGE FROM ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EEDA

JOY O'SHAUGHNESSY

In her letter, Lisa mentioned our work with Dr. Richter and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. Throughout this newsletter you will see the wonderful results of EEDA's ongoing efforts to ensure the people we support are included in our community in a myriad of ways. Inclusion can be defined as the consideration that all people, regardless of ability, have the right to fully participate and contribute in all activities, and to have the opportunity to interact with community members and develop meaningful relationships. Inclusion, for those we support is a vital part of EEDA's DNA.

Over the last year, members of the EEDA community have faithfully participated in the Town of Riverhead Inclusion Task Force at Town Hall where we met Liz O'Shaughnessy (no relation), Executive Director of the Riverhead Chamber of Commerce. The mission statement of this group is "The Riverhead Inclusion Task Force works towards a universally designed and inclusive environment that makes it easy for all people, regardless of disability, to participate fully in community life. The Task Force will assist the Town and its residents in recognizing and addressing barriers and opportunities toward meeting this goal."

One way we know that we are successful with inclusion is when people with disabilities are thought of when new events, locations, or activities are being planned. I am so proud to live and work in a community where EEDA and those we support were invited by Liz O'Shaughnessy to participate in an inaugural event. Our Creative Arts Program participants were asked to perform holiday songs on stage at the First Annual Town of Riverhead Holiday Tree Lighting. We appreciated the invitation from Liz to join the festivities, and we loved seeing our photos in Dan's Papers next to all the other local and international celebrities in the news. This is a beautiful example of helping people live inclusive and "happy lives." I hope to see you at the tree lighting next year!

Town of Riverhead Inclusion Task Force

Join us in helping to strengthen the relationship between the Town of Riverhead and its residents living with disabilities and to provide a forum for committee members to discuss current topics, challenges, and to acknowledge contributions to community life.

All residents of Riverhead are welcome to join. Meetings are held quarterly at Riverhead Town Hall,

200 Howell Ave., Riverhead, NY 11901

May 3rd, 2023, 5:00 PM

August 7th, 2023, 5:00 PM

November 1st, 2023, 5:00 PM

Please email jeremyg@eed-a.org if you are interested in attending the committee.



RESPIRE HOUSE

After being closed for over two years, EEDA's Overnight Respite house is open again! Overnight respite is so important for families—it allows them to take care of other areas of their life while knowing their loved one is in a safe place where they'll have fun and receive the support they need. People who stay at the Respite house often call it their vacation. The house received its certification on July 29th, 2022. Staff were hired, and the house opened its doors to program participants in October. The house is currently able to serve two to three people from Tuesday afternoon through Saturday afternoon. The house hopes to attract more individuals to the program next quarter and eventually increase its capacity to serve four people at a time. Tell your friends the Respite house is open again!



VAN GOGH PROJECT

EEDA partnered with East End Arts to put together a ten-week workshop for people with all abilities. Nine members of EEDA's Creative Arts Program participated in this workshop and each session involved art education, set design, painting, building props, nurturing creative relationships, confidence building, and theater set creation. Participants learned a script for a short play that explored the life and career of Van Gogh and the mystery behind who really cut off the artist's ear. This workshop brought a full creative arts experience to participants while building friendships, self-esteem, and creating community connections. It culminated in the performance of the play, Vincent & Gauguin's EARoneous Tale on February 24th at the Jamesport Meeting House. The play was a big hit with audience members, featuring beautiful props reminiscent of Van Gogh's work, creative costumes, and a wonderful performance from workshop participants!



SENIOR MANAGER OF DAY SERVICES PATTI MAIORANA'S EXPERIENCE AT THE NYDA RALLY



I was so blessed to be able to attend the NYDA rally in Albany on Wednesday, November 16th with some of my EEDA colleagues and self-advocates.

The plea was to urge our state lawmakers and Governor Kathy Hochul to include a much needed 8.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for our essential disability support workforce and enhancements to DSP salaries in the state's next budget. Without adequately paid staff, the future of disability support in New York is bleak. Advocacy is the hope for positive change.

Participating in this event was very profound for me. I felt we were doing more than just talking and complaining about our industry's difficulties. Instead, we were making a stand and showing our faces in a room full of people experiencing the exact same challenges. You could feel the unity, and sadly, the desperation in the air that we are all feeling. Listening to the family members, the individuals we support, and the essential team members speak only added more fight to us all!

I felt so proud when our own Matt Kuriloff got up and spoke while wearing our EEDA sweatshirt, representing us all! His remarks had the whole crowd cheering. I urge all EEDA stakeholders to consider joining us in this crusade next time. Being part of something so important is beyond exhilarating.

"Enhance the pay so staff can stay!" we chanted.

NEW YORK STATE BUDGET

On February 13th, hundreds of advocates from EEDA and other agencies across New York State gathered at the Capitol to meet with legislators and rally to urge the governor not to forget about the DSP workforce in the state budget. There is a \$10 difference in the rate of pay for DSPs working in state facilities versus DSPs working in nonprofit facilities. Why are we valued less?

New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) is recommending the establishment of a new Direct Support Wage Enhancement (DSWE) as part of the 2024 New York State budget. Through the proposed DSWE, provider agencies would receive an annual funding allocation of \$4,000 per eligible employee to be used for the purpose of enhancing the hourly rate of pay for all staff that have direct care/support responsibilities for individuals with I/DD.

Due to significant inflationary growth over the past year, not-for-profit provider agencies operating costs have increased significantly, necessitating an 8.5% COLA in the enacted SFY 2024 Budget. Unfortunately the proposed 2.5% increase in the executive budget does not provide the necessary resources to continue to invest in the vital workforce needed to provide high quality life supporting services and will erase the progress that has been made the past year.

Please contact your legislators and ask them to include and advocate for these two important priorities for the DSP workforce. The budget is expected to be passed by April 1st.



G.U.S. *Award*

Named after our beloved and retired director, Gus Lagoumis, The Great Unparalleled Service Award is presented to a staff member who is nominated by their peers as someone who consistently fulfills their job responsibilities while exemplifying EEDA's values. Award recipients are the backbone of the agency—without these staff, the agency would not function. In November, EEDA proudly announced Aleatra Eleazar as the 2022 fourth quarter recipient of the Great Unparalleled Service award! Aleatra, has been with EEDA for five years and was nominated by her peers and supervisors, who consistently witness her dedication to our organization and the people we support. Her commitment to our mission is something we want to celebrate and to give her the recognition that she deserves. Thank you, Aleatra, for everything you do! Congratulations!



RIVERHEAD TREE LIGHTING



On December 4th, our very own Creative Arts Program was honored to perform at the first annual Riverhead Tree Lighting in Riverhead's new town square in front of the Suffolk theatre. With the town square being a block from EEDA's administration building, we were proud to be included in this new tradition. Executive Director of the Riverhead Chamber of Commerce, Liz O'Shaughnessy, and Riverhead Town Supervisor, Yvette Aguiar, invited our Creative Arts Program performers to take the stage and spread some holiday cheer! Mariella, Kaitlyn, Christine, Brandon, Jamie, Giancarlo, Paul, Marc, Star, and Hava really embodied what it means to be a performer—it's obvious they thrive on stage! Our Creative Arts Program has slowly been building up to in-person performances, and this was a great example of just how important events like these are!

Holiday FESTIVITIES



St. Rosalie's Christmas Party

The Knights of Columbus Council 7023 of St. Rosalie's Church in Hampton Bays held their annual Christmas party for those of all faiths in support of people with developmental disabilities. Holiday merriment was had by all with music, dancing, games, and presents for everyone who attended. And of course, a special visit from Santa Claus himself! Thank you to the Knights of Columbus for pulling this together every year for the people we support.

KELLY WERESNICK WINS SANYS DSP OF THE YEAR AWARD!

Kelly has been an EEDA employee since 2015 and continues to aid EEDA's growth through the Creative Arts Program. Kelly assists the people supported in learning routines, songs, and roles for shows including talent shows, plays, and concerts. Kelly attended school for theater and when she is not working at EEDA, she is working in a local theater with lighting since theater is her passion. Kelly assists the EEDA SANYS group by helping them set up meetings on Zoom and ensuring they have all required materials. Throughout the pandemic Kelly worked at the residences to ensure the people supported were doing meaningful and fun activities. One of her supervisors recalls that Kelly took the time to make homemade birdhouse kits, in which she cut the wood herself! The people Kelly supports look to her for daily guidance and assistance as she is truly a fan favorite here at the Creative Arts Program. Kelly supports people by ensuring they have a meaningful life full of choices, activities, and laughs. She inspires and engages people to do things they never thought they could achieve. Kelly's out of the box thinking truly embodies what this field is all about.



BUTTERFLY EFFECT PROJECT

EEDA recently partnered with the Butterfly Effect Project, a local not-for-profit organization whose mission is to create safe spaces for girls to dream and succeed. EEDA staff and supported individuals met with the group to discuss opportunities for future careers in the I/DD nonprofit sector, and to learn about what we do and who we support. The girls were a lot of fun and very engaging, and we hope to have some of them come work at EEDA in the future!



TERMS OF SERVICE

Awards

20 YEARS

Carrie Manuel

15 YEARS

Lisa Kennedy
Krystal Turpin
Tisa Robinson
Christopher Zerella

10 YEARS

Melvine Riddick
Kevin Hulse
Celina Green
Cody Hopson

5 YEARS

Heather Vassar
Lisa Rhyner
Anna Semisa
Christina Lebron
Dequan Clairborne
Jovan Daniels
Crystal Mosley
Wesley Walker

Kimberly Brown
Tyra Shepard
Ashley Alexander
Tena Redding
Aleatra Eleazer
Darryl Sookbirsingh
Kelly Mccauley
Cynthia Guigliano
Ciara White
Laurie Simone

ADULT SOCIALIZATION PROGRAM

EEDA's Adult Socialization program is a respite program that brings the people we support together during evening hours. Our attendees enjoy a variety of programming, including outings in the community and group activities at the site. In January our Adult Social participants visited Sayville's Cat café and enjoyed hot chocolate and playing with the cats or playing some Pacman! They also had an indoor movie night on the big screen, enjoying popcorn and snacks on the couch at our site. On National Green Juice Day they took a trip to Tropical Smoothie Café and got to enjoy their drinks together. They collaborated with our Respite house and met at the Riverhead Wave's basketball game to cheer them on together! The Adult Socialization program creates opportunities for the people we support to attend exciting events and programming during evening hours that are not available during regular program hours.



CONGRATS TO THE SELF-DIRECTION STAFF CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NADSP E-BADGE ACADEMY

On behalf of Self-Directed Services, we would like to congratulate Self-Direction DSPs Nicholas Auletti, Renee Baskerville, Cori Crosby, Daniel Karron, Adaora Obi, and Staff Support Coordinator Lisa Rhyner on being chosen to participate in the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) E-Badge Academy to become credentialed Direct Support Professionals.

Cori brings a wonderful mix of caring and teaching in her job as a Self-Direction DSP. She is excited that she has the opportunity to become credentialed and further recognize the incredible work of Senior DSPs.

Nicholas has been with EEDA for over two years and was so excited to learn of the program. His enthusiasm for the families he supports is fantastic and he jumped at the opportunity to enhance his skills.

Daniel supports multiple participants who have had amazing success, and the energy he brings to work every day has a noticeable impact on them. He's looking forward to learning even more and sharing these skills with other Self-Direction DSPs.

Adaora's work ethic and commitment made her a perfect choice for participation in this program. We have little doubt that the participants she supports will benefit from this additional training.

Renee is a great support and advocate for her families. She has been a rock for these families and a role model for the other Self-Direction DSPs. We are thrilled that she is able to take advantage of this program.

Lisa is the perfect staff member to participate in this training initiative because she's the Self-Direction employee who provides support and training to all DSPs in Self-Direction. We are excited for her to share all that she learns with the Self-Direction team and all the Self-Direction DSPs.

Congratulations, everyone!

The NADSP E-Badge Academy



In September 2022, EEDA applied for a grant to provide DSP credentialing through the NADSP E-Badge Academy. In October, EEDA was notified that it was one of 17 organizations selected to move forward with this program to credential up to 35 DSPs per year. The grant covers the enrollment costs and provides a completion bonus and time reimbursement for each person who completes a DSP E-Badge training level. There are three levels available to DSPs. The NADSP E-Badge Academy provides an innovative and user-friendly platform for DSPs to demonstrate their skill set and professional knowledge. This credentialing program serves as a critical step toward the goal of credentialing DSPs so they are widely recognized as the professional, highly skilled service providers they are.



DONOR *Spotlight*

“Kindness is like snow.
It beautifies everything it covers.” – Kahlil Gibran

Thanks to the generous donation of **Karin & Walter Gravagna** of Van de Wetering Greenhouses our EEDA residents received some very special deliveries this holiday season. Beautifully wrapped and left under each tree, was a holiday blanket picked out especially for each of them.

During this past season of giving and all year round, we are grateful for the caring and thoughtful expressions of joy that our donors bring to the lives of those we support. **Their generosity is truly beyond compare!**



CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND 4-H PROGRAM WITHOUT WALLS

EEDA recently created a new program with the Cornell Cooperative Extension and 4-H. This program is coordinated by Kelly Weresnick, Environmental Educator, and currently serves two individuals at the Dorothy P. Flint 4-H Camp. Collin Hedges, the Dorothy P. Flint 4-H Camp Manager, recommends activities for program participants, and Kelly supports them as they care for goats, bunnies, and chickens. Participants clean out the chicken coops and collect the eggs, as well as clean out the horse corral and other parts of the property.

The program receives daily visits from people who are interested in learning more with the possibility of joining the group. Current participants have already seen health benefits from working outdoors and being more physically active. The program hopes to expand its reach to additional organizations in the community to learn even more about animal husbandry. EEDA is very excited about this new program and the impact it will have on participants and our community!



ESTATE PLANNING

Making a planned gift is a wonderful way to support EEDA while taking care of your own personal, financial, and philanthropic needs. With the right planning, you can and will increase the size of your estate and/or reduce the tax burden of your heirs. Through a planned gift, you can make a meaningful contribution that will support the individuals served at EEDA for years to come.

The following are examples of planned gifts:

Bequest
Charitable Remainder Trust
Life Insurance
Qualified Retirement Plans – IRAs
401k, KEOGH and others

For more information on Estate Planning, please contact the Foundation Office at 631-369-7345 ext. .243

Giving Monthly

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE EACH AND EVERY MONTH.

EEDA's monthly giving program provides ongoing support to ensure that a steady flow of funds is available. Monthly recurring donations require no additional action on your part because your online gift is automatically processed.

EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS!

Visit www.eed-a.org/donate to give monthly. Gifts may also be made in honor of/ in memory of a loved one.





Creating Opportunities for Happy Lives



107 Roanoke Ave | Riverhead, NY 11901

631.369.7345 | www.eed-a.org



Save the Date

Thursday, June 1st, 2023
Atlantis Aquarium & Sea Star Ballroom
Riverhead, New York

Celebrating 30 Years!