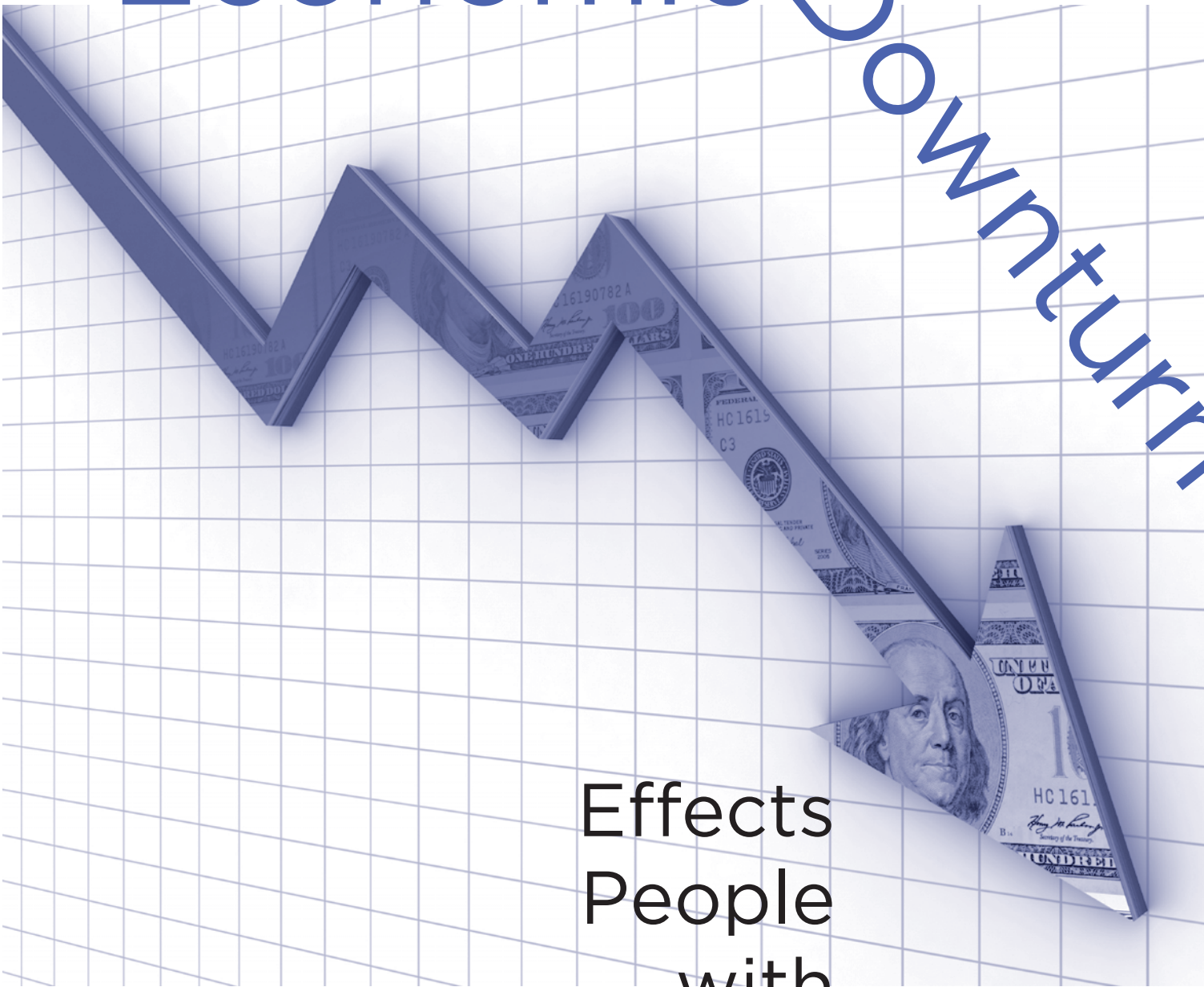


Economic Downturn



Effects People with Developmental Disabilities

by Jonathan Jaffe

Robert Rieck is among the many people with disabilities in New Jersey who are struggling to make ends meet in the slow economy.

Even though he has training in mechanical drafting, the 33-year-old Pine Brook man is out of work. In September, he was laid off from his job as an assistant at easyclosets.com in Parsippany. With the cut in income, he had to move to a \$750-a-month apartment, live off unemployment and severance and hope to find a job in one of the lousiest job markets in years.

“I want a creative job in computers or engineering,” said Rieck, who sustained a traumatic brain injury when he was 16. “Right now, I am being very careful about how I spend money because I need to live. The job market is very bad right now.”

Agencies who help people with developmental disabilities find jobs say the bleak economy has made it difficult to match people with the jobs they want. Fewer jobs are available, as many opportunities are going to over-qualified people—many with college degrees—who are eager for work.



“I am hearing numerous examples of both positions and training programs being cut,” said Dan Baker of the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities. “I have also heard from a number of professionals in the field that they are having a much harder time getting employment or training opportunities for persons with disabilities.

“While this is true for all Americans, to paraphrase an old quote, ‘when America sneezes, people with disabilities get the flu,’ Baker said. “Some of the bigger employers that have shut their doors were often great employers for persons with disabilities, such as Circuit City.”

Tom Baffuto, executive director of the Arc of New Jersey, said many people with developmental disabilities are getting their hours cut or their jobs eliminated. “It’s just a whole lot harder to find the jobs for people and get them decent hours,” he said.

Baffuto said people with developmental disabilities are a very reliable workforce that employers rely on. “After all of these years demonstrating that people with disabilities can be good employees, I don’t know what else we can do,” he said.

“I want a creative job in computers or engineering . . .

“Right now, I am being very careful about how I spend money because I need to live. The job market is very bad right now.”

Robert Rieck looks for jobs on his home computer. He also has his own website for people with disabilities.

THE STATE CAN HELP

Baker said a resource for people seeking work is the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). If someone loses their job, they can enroll or re-enroll in state-supported services to find a job.

“Any of the generic labor market/unemployment resources that are open to the general population are open to persons with disabilities as well, but may not have the specific expertise to assist a person with more significant disabilities,” Baker said.

DVRS SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Vocational Counseling & Guidance – Providing assistance to the consumer in handling the job search issues that impact employability, job maintenance strategies, and developing the overall techniques needed to be successful in a work environment.
- Placement Services—Development of job leads both with and for the consumer, and support during the job search; could include on-the-job training, supported employment and/or coaching.
- Job Seeking Skills—Guidance in work search activities such as resume writing, interviewing skills, job search organization.
- Supported Employment—One-on-one assistance in job searching, interviewing, applying for jobs; followed by coaching on the job to facilitate learning job duties and adjusting to the work environment; followed by periodic follow-up to ensure job retention.
- Time Limited Placement and Coaching—The first two categories of Supported Employment Services without periodic follow-along.
- Job Accommodations—Guidance on changing the worksite’s physical environment or adding equipment that will allow an individual to do more work tasks independently, effectively and safely.
- Skills Training—Vocational school, technology or trade school, business school, etc.

Brian Fitzgibbons, acting director of DVRS, said the agency does not track the additional

number of people with developmental disabilities now seeking work through the division.

“But we have seen our offices slightly more crowded with people with disabilities because their old job cut hours, or they were the last hired and first fired,” he said. “Once they are an employee in the mainstream, they are subject to the same rights. And they are also subject to the same pitfalls. If they don’t have seniority, they will go first.”

“... when America sneezes, people with disabilities get the flu ...”

*—Dan Baker,
Elizabeth M. Boggs Center
on Developmental Disabilities*

Michael Prendergast, assistant executive director of Project Hire, which provides employment through the Arc of the New Jersey, said the number of placements has dropped 30 percent from last year. Last year, Project Hire had 180 placements. This year, the number has dwindled to 126 placements, he said.

“What we are seeing from people who are employed is that they need to work the cash register or take on additional responsibilities that can be difficult depending on their skill level,” Prendergast said.

Project Hire has also seen an increase in the number of people laid off. Last year, he said, seven individuals lost their job. By June 1, Project Hire was already up to 15 layoffs. Others have kept their jobs, but have seen their hours drastically cut, he noted.

Lauren Lash, director of supportive employment for Our House in Murray Hill, said her agency is seeing a similar trend in Union, Morris,

Somerset and Essex counties among the 150 individuals it serves each year.

“We place 15-20 individuals a year; others we serve have been in jobs for years and we are helping them maintain them,” she said. “We saw this past fall and winter a drop off. It is harder to get placements for people when employers are cutting down on their budgets.”

Just in December, she said, seven individuals lost jobs they had been in for a long time. Other employers called Our House to say they had no choice but to reduce work schedules for people with disabilities.

“Employers feel people with disabilities can’t do all the tasks they want them to do,” Lash said. “For example, people working in a retail store are now not just working in the fitting room. They are running the cash register and doing returns and working in the stock room.”

CUTS IN STATE AID

Fitzgibbons said state budget cuts are also affecting people with developmental disabilities, noting the agency has 3,000 full-time equivalent slots for supported employment.

Sheltered workshops in New Jersey, which includes 31 locations, are being cut \$1.9 million to \$17.6 million. That cut, equivalent to \$700 per employee, will be paid out of the pocket of the vendors running the workshops. Employees will still work 220 days a year.

A budget of \$4.4 million for transportation is being cut by \$400,000; people with developmental disabilities will only receive 85 percent reimbursement on their travel expenses. Previously, the state had paid the entire bill for bus passes and specialized transportation to work.

In addition, a budget of \$5.5 million for long-term job coaching in supported employment will take a \$1 million hit, Fitzgibbons said.

Economic struggles among people with disabilities are not just in New Jersey, said Dan Berland, the federal policy analyst for the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

“From the calls for help we are getting in our Washington D.C. office, people need help,” Berland said. “Many already live on fixed incomes

and they just don’t have the resources to maintain themselves with the slowing economy.”

In May, the unemployment rate among people with disabilities reached 13.7 percent compared with 12.9 percent in April. Meanwhile, unemployment grew for the rest of the population as well, up to 8.9 percent from 8.4 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

While unemployment dropped for people with disabilities in March and April, the numbers didn’t tell the whole story. The decline was largely because of fewer people looking for jobs, not an increase in the number of people with jobs. In May, however, the size of the workforce remained steady with the previous month.

The federal labor department began tracking employment for people with disabilities in October 2008. The data covers people with disabilities over the age of 16 who do not live in institutions.

“Many more people with disabilities want to work and can’t find jobs, compared to people without disabilities,” Berland said. “It is a disproportionate effect. When the market gets tighter and many people are out of work, there are a lot of barriers exacerbated for people with disabilities.”

Richard Hrynoveski, director of Revolution New Jersey of Landing, which also works to find work for people with disabilities, said it has always been difficult to find work because of “rampant discrimination” among potential employers.

“Employers have told us they don’t hire those kinds of people or it didn’t work out beforehand and they weren’t interested,” Hrynoveski said. “Now, with so many people competing for entry level positions, it makes it difficult on existing options. If you have an employer that can combine positions, they will do it just to survive.

“If, for example, the lack of business in a mall prompts its owners to increase the rent on the individual businesses, people with disabilities tend to be the ones ultimately affected,” he said. “The business owners need to make cuts and look to see what staff is limited in ability.”

“In today’s economy, it’s not just about discrimination,” Hrynoveski said. “It is about the survival of the business.” **P&F**

The Federal Stimulus

by Jonathan Jaffe

Considered the most sweeping financial legislation in the history of the United States, the \$787 billion stimulus package signed on February 17 is designed to provide billions of dollars for people with developmental disabilities.

“We are very hopeful that this stimulus package will benefit people with developmental disabilities,” said Nancy Starnes, senior vice president of the National Organization on Disability (NOD). “These individuals are often the poorest of the poor, the last to be hired and the first to be fired. People with developmental disabilities are historically overlooked in terms of civil rights protection.”

Disability experts, who have closely followed the progression of the ‘*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*’ from a proposal to a law, say the funds for people with disabilities include:

- *\$86 billion, to fund a temporary adjustment to the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage, which matches federal and state money to support medical and social service programs. New Jersey will get \$362.2 million of this share, under the plan.*
- *\$12.2 billion, to fund Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs. IDEA, a civil rights law, funds states and public agencies efforts to provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities. IDEA supports the educational needs of children with disabilities from birth to age 21.*
Funding will be provided over a two-year period to cover the reduction in local revenue and state support to school districts. Half of the funds, according to the law, must be distributed by the U.S. Department of Education by July 1 of next year.
- *\$1 billion, for use by the Social Security Administration for infrastructure improvements and critical agency functions. Half of the money will go toward processing disability and retirement workloads, addressing the agency’s significant backlog of claims.*
- *\$540 million, in grants to the states for vocational rehabilitation services.*
- *Individual checks of \$250, a one-time stimulus payment to those who receive SSI or Social Security benefits. Everyone eligible for the payment was expected to receive a payment by the end of May. More than 55 million people are eligible for the checks.*

Starnes said NOD is encouraged that federal lawmakers are providing some focus on “a long-forgotten part of the American demographic—people with developmental disabilities.”

“We are interested in tracking how the money filters down into state government,” she said. “We will watch how the \$540 million for vocational rehab is distributed, according to congressional intent. The stimulus money needs to get down to the levels where it can help the individuals in communities across the country.”

Dan Berland, the federal policy analyst for the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, said the group is closely tracking how the stimulus money funnels to state governments.

“There is a lot of movement with the money,” Berland said. “But getting the stimulus money down to the levels in which it will help individuals in communities across the country is moving a bit slow.”

Brian Fitzgibbons, acting director of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, said the agency is receiving a total of \$9.5 million, of which half was received in April. The balance will be paid in October.

“The money is being used to train people who need jobs,” Fitzgibbons said. “This is not just for people with developmental disabilities, but also for those with traumatic head injuries, residual disabilities, psychiatric illness, substance abuse and others.”

He noted nearly \$2 million of the stimulus money is earmarked for people with visual impairments.

THE MONEY WILL BE USED TO:

- *Hire part-time staff for job placement.*
- *Devote money to one-stop career centers, including personnel who can help people with disabilities navigate the system.*
- *Support seven small businesses run by people with disabilities.*
- *Provide the first month’s salary for college graduates.*
- *Fund a number of non-profit social enterprises around the state that support people with disabilities.*

“This has been described as manna from heaven,” said Fitzgibbons said. “It will really stimulate the reinvestment process in the country. All of the funds must be committed by Sept. 30, 2010 and spent by Sept. 30, 2011.” **P&F**



WORKING HER WAY UP

Julie Blackman on the Job

by Maryann B. Hunsberger

Like most of us, Julie Blackman wants more pay. Unlike some of us, she welcomes the responsibility that goes with that.

Early on, Blackman, who has an intellectual disability, was able to transition smoothly from public high school to community living and a job at Taco Bell. Supported by Drew Smith, an employment specialist at Delta Community Supports, Blackman was looking to improve her pay and up her responsibilities at ShopRite, which she had heard through others was a good employer.

Then—as all too often happens—her life took a turn, literally. Blackman was in a car accident.

A car she was riding in rolled over and her hand was crushed. She thought her plans for moving up in the work world would be permanently derailed.

“I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to get the job that I wanted. I spent all my time going to doctors’ offices. I was very unhappy because I wanted to work,” she said. But Blackman persevered.

Once Blackman recovered, she reconnected with Smith. They set up interviews at ShopRite and got her a position there. With the help of two job coaches—Smith and Scott McDonald—Blackman settled into a steady, unassisted routine bagging groceries.

“I bagged groceries for about two years. I thought the job was a lot of fun. I got to meet people and I sometimes carried their bags to their car. They gave me tips. I really liked working for my bosses. You need to like your bosses.”

McDonald, who is now the director of supported employment at Delta, said their job is to provide support and guidance.

“In the area where Julie lives, there were different work options, but Julie liked ShopRite best,” McDonald said. “Our philosophy is that people come to us after they choose what they want to do, and we do our best to attempt to provide those services, including training on the job.”

Blackman became more familiar with the store’s layout and was promoted to returns. As a front-end returns manager, Blackman is responsible for re-shelving un-bought and returned items.

McDonald isn’t surprised that Blackman advanced on the job.

“She is hardworking. Her coworkers and employers find her to be highly motivated, responsible



Julie is shown with her boss, Lou Balestriere, at the ShopRite where she works.

and personable. She hardly ever misses work. This promotion was a big step.

“Coworkers and managers come to her because she’s good at it.”

Blackman’s supervisor, Tyshima Myers, agrees.

“She’s a hard worker and has come a long way from when she was a bagger. Besides managing the front-end returns, she helps in the bakery and the health and beauty aisles.”

Tricia Wiser, who manages the health and beauty aisle, said Blackman has transformed while working at her job.

“She interacts more with customers and takes on much more responsibility. I don’t think she expected to work her way up like she did. She’s come a long way.”

Blackman’s experience is a good guide for other people with developmental disabilities looking to be successful in the workplace.

“When someone with a disability wants a job, they should talk to other people to find out which employers and companies are good to work for,” said Blackman. “They should find out how much different jobs pay. If people want to get promoted at work, they should do a good job. They should make an effort to get along with coworkers. They shouldn’t miss work. I go to work even when I don’t feel like it sometimes, because I don’t want to let my bosses down.” **P&F**

The “Just Say Something” Campaign

Douglas Newman,
Mayor of South
Orange Village,
at the Caldwell
Community
Conversation

Nearly two decades after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people of all ages with developmental disabilities continue to be undervalued by society. Many still lack jobs, health care, housing, and access to public venues. Children are often underserved or excluded from local schools, and community activities. Too many people with developmental disabilities still live in outdated state institutions. Thousands more are waiting for housing. Many sit for years on state waiting lists for support services they are qualified to receive.

Researchers estimate that nearly twenty percent of New Jersey’s citizens have a disability. Yet issues related to people with developmental disabilities and their families receive very little attention in the mainstream media. They are underrepresented in mainstream advertising and they are often not considered by elected officials, business leaders and community leaders to have a relevant voice in public debates and discussions.

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is addressing this problem by bringing issues that matter to people with developmental disabilities into the public discourse. The Council is calling on people throughout the state and beyond to “Just Say Something;” to speak up and publicly

discuss issues affecting and influencing the lives of people with disabilities whenever and wherever the opportunities arise.

“For too many years, including people with developmental disabilities has been an after-thought,” said Dr. Allison Lozano, executive director of the Council. “This campaign is aimed at addressing that injustice.”

Last fall, the Council polled its constituents. Their responses confirmed what they and many others with developmental disabilities, their families and colleagues have been feeling for years.

That people with developmental disabilities do not have full access to public events, such as street fairs, parks and concerts (86%).

That people with developmental disabilities do not have full access to public buildings (more than 88%).

That people with developmental disabilities do not receive fair and balanced news coverage (98%).

That most Americans without disabilities do not consider people with developmental disabilities to be productive members of society (more than 92%)

This spring, the Council hosted a series of three unique coffeehouse meetings across the state. At those “Community Conversations”

people with developmental disabilities, family members and professionals they work with held candid discussions with some key community leaders about public perceptions of people with disabilities, as a first step towards encouraging full community participation.

The ideas reaffirmed and generated by the survey and the Community Conversations prompted the Council to launch its “Just Say Something” campaign. This public awareness campaign, the second phase of this project, is designed to educate, inform and empower people with disabilities and their families so they can engage in public discussions about the issues that matter most to them.

“The campaign encourages people to speak up in a wide range of venues, bringing a much needed perspective from the disability community to the broader community,” said Dr. Lozano. “What the campaign encourages is simple: Take notice of situations that speak positively or negatively to the issue of full inclusion of people with developmental and other disabilities, and then ‘just saying something’ about them.”

Many of the ideas for the “Just Say Something” Campaign came directly from participants in the Community Conversations. For example:

1. When leafing through a sales circular or catalogue, if you notice that people with developmental disabilities are included and portrayed in a positive way, write a letter or pick up the phone and share your favorable impressions with the business owner. Share your views with others in your community. Strike up a conversation at the store with a sales person. Urge others to shop in that business and tell them why.
2. If you come across a TV show or movie that portrays people with disabilities in stereotypical ways, or in a negative way, share your views with the producer and with others. Talk about your impressions with friends and neighbors. Use blogging or Twittering to share your concerns; write letters to the editor or write to the production company. If it is a movie, talk to other moviegoers.
3. If you read or hear a news story or magazine article in which “people first” language is used, share your views with the editor or publisher. Let

them know how important it is. And, when this language is not used, they also need to know.

The Campaign has three distinct components: Local grassroots campaign; direct media outreach; and social networking strategies, including a new blog.

LOCAL GRASS ROOTS ACTIVITIES WILL:

- Invite New Jersey residents to “just say something” about the perspectives of people with disabilities and increase a general awareness of people with developmental disabilities as consumers, employees, classmates, citizens and neighbors. The campaign will encourage a public discourse at every level – sharing both positive and negative reactions about policy, business, advertising and media.
- Encourage people to write letters to the editor, use radio talk shows, social media and other media to talk about developmental disabilities, participation and full inclusion.
- Provide information about the Community Conversation process so that citizens can host local conversations with leaders in their communities.

Direct Media Outreach will include editorial board meetings, press releases about the campaign and what people are saying, as well as feature stories in media about participants in the campaign.

Social Networking Strategies will include a blog—www.justsaysomething.org—where citizens are invited to blog about what they have seen and what they have said about it, post ideas, images, links, perspectives, activities and strategies. Business leaders and elected officials will be welcomed to blog as well; a Twitter campaign for participants to share their observations and activities in real time; as well as using chat rooms and news story blogs sponsored by local news websites to highlight the campaign and encourage conversations.

“This campaign encourages and supports positive dialogue,” added Dr. Lozano. “Good advocacy is not only about changing those things that are not working, it is about noticing and supporting those things that are. Community leaders, business leaders and lawmakers need to know that we are here, we are paying attention, and we are going to say something about it.” **P&F**

Council Honors Contributions to

In April, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities held its first Community Building Awards to honor those who have made substantial contributions toward building communities more inclusive of people with developmental disabilities.



Left to right, Elaine Buchsbaum, Chair of Council; Mary Kay Weber, Vice Chair of Council; and representing Senator Codey, Patrick Gillespie, Executive Director of the NJ Senate Majority

Senator Richard Codey (West Orange)

For his exceptional work over 25 years of public service in championing public policies which people with disabilities need to live with dignity, safety, inclusion and self-direction. (Exceptional Policymaker Award)

The Star Ledger (Newark)

For consistently reporting and commenting on issues important to people with developmental disabilities and their families, including recent coverage of the state's intractable waiting list for residential services for people with developmental disabilities and ongoing calls to close some of the state's developmental centers. (Multi-media Award)



Building Better Communities



John Kover

John Kover (Cherry Hill)

For his lifetime of personal and systems advocacy, including surviving 40 years in state institutions and using those experiences to advocate for better options for people with developmental disabilities. (Lifetime Achievement Award)

The Council believes highlighting that good work will promote more of it and help our state's varied communities thrive. Toward that end the Council chose the first recipients of its Community Building Awards, starting an annual tradition that will include a nominations process through the fall and winter and an awards banquet each April.

Barbara Coppens (Cherry Hill)

For her leadership role in the state's self-advocacy movement for over 25 years, including frequent visits to people still living in institutions, volunteer work with grass roots advocacy groups such as the Self-Advocacy Project, and many other activities on behalf of people with developmental disabilities and their families. (Colleen Fraser Self-Advocacy Award)



Barbara Coppens



Donna Icovino

Donna Icovino (Millstone Township)

For her work on behalf of people with developmental disabilities and mental illness and their families, including chairing the New Jersey Department of Human Services Dual Diagnosis Task Force, co-authoring a family crisis handbook and teaching others how to advocate for themselves and their families. (Elizabeth M. Boggs Family Member Advocacy Award)



Sandra Bongart

Sandra Bongart/Adorn Beauty Center (Bordentown): For showing how businesses can lead the way to making New Jersey communities open to people with developmental disabilities through an innovative “pet therapy” that helps those with challenging behaviors become more at ease in social situations. (Access Above and Beyond Award)



Seeking Ways Out Together (SWOT) Team (Trenton-based Statewide)

For their work in supporting people living in New Jersey's institutions who want to move into the community. The team is comprised of former institution residents who go back to those facilities to help current residents advocate for themselves and make the transition to community life. (Distinguished DD Systems Change Award)



Bob Fessell, member of the 'SWOT' team

“We feel it is important to identify and recognize good works in ensuring that New Jersey’s communities are open and accepting of all members,” says Dr. Alison Lozano, executive director of the Council. “We congratulate this year’s winners and look forward to next year’s awards process. Together, we can make positive change happen.” [P&F](#)