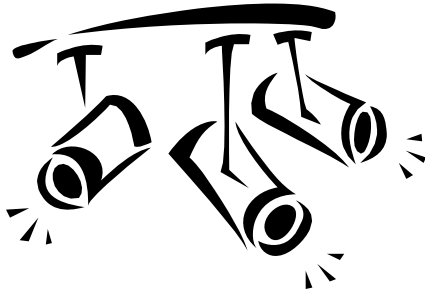


Homewards



Spotlight on The Disability Connection

The Disability Connection - One-Stop Shopping

By Peggy Robertson

Where can people with disabilities go for access to a full array of services? Oftentimes people with disabilities encounter barriers for full inclusion in the community. Some of the challenges they face include where to find accessible housing, how to get furniture, how to move from one place to another, how to get good personal care and support services, where to go for prescription assistance, the list goes on. In Allegheny County, there is an agency that has been able to streamline access to all of these services. The Disability Connection is considered a one-stop shop for people with disabilities in order to help them find and coordinate the services they need to live independently in their homes and in the community.

Background

Judy Barricella, Director of The Disability Connection, has been with the agency since its inception in 2000. At

that time, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, through the Office of Community Relations, created The Disability Connection to help coordinate efforts to improve services to people with disabilities. The mission of The Disability Connection was to elevate the issues of quality of life, equal opportunity and effective participation in the community for all people with disabilities in Allegheny County. They did so by providing information and training to county staff, disability organizations and people in the community to educate them on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and policy issues.

Ms. Barricella explained that The Disability Connection has been very successful at connecting people with disabilities to available resources, an area of expertise that other agencies have recognized. In the past two years The Disability Connection has expanded its role by taking advantage of two exciting opportunities. Because of their ability to coordinate resources for people with disabilities, The Disability Connection received a grant to be one of two sites in

Inside This Edition...

Save the Date	4
A New Journey.....	5
SDHP Receives Inglis Award	8
Upcoming Conference.....	10

(Continued on page 2)

(Disability Connection continued from page 1)

the Commonwealth designated by the Governor's Office of Health Care Reform (GOHCR) to operate the pilot project Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). It was also selected as one of five agencies in the state to serve as part of the Regional Housing Coordinator Program as a single point of access for technical assistance, training and outreach at the regional level to meet the housing needs of people with disabilities.

The Allegheny Link

The ADRC program in Allegheny County is known as the Allegheny Link, which serves individuals over the age of 60 and people of all ages with disabilities. The other pilot project in Cumberland County is known as the Cumberland Link. The purpose of the Allegheny Link is to simplify and streamline access to long-term living services and supports; provide assistance to consumers who are seeking services and making long-term living decisions; and to increase awareness and provide reliable information. The Allegheny Link provides integrated screening,

counseling and referral, and facilitates access to publicly and privately funded services and benefits to people regardless of age or disability. This is a collaborative effort among local agencies, organizations and individual consumers which ensures that consumers in need of long-term care – whether it is funded through Medicaid, the Older Americans Act, state revenue or through private sources – can make a single contact to get all of their service needs met.

The goals of the Allegheny Link are to:

- Develop a seamless system that will include eligibility screening, counseling, quicker functional and financial eligibility determinations and personalized referrals;
- Make available comprehensive and consumer friendly information on long-term living services and benefits;
- Link individuals who are not eligible for Home and Community Based Services with other

community resources (including private-pay individuals); and

- Integrate the Nursing Home Transition program into the ADRC's operation.

Joe Elliott, Resource Center Manager for the Link, said that the Link will provide information, guidance, and screenings to anyone regardless of income because early intervention usually results in cost effective, positive outcomes for the individual. Mr. Elliott explained that the Link has been a great fit with The Disability Connection. Mr. Elliott started with the agency in 2003 and became fulltime in 2005. He noted, "All along we had been doing what the Link is charged with before we got the grant. The Link has helped us strengthen our partnership with our contracted providers and enabled us to hire more staff. In addition to my position, we now have two fulltime staff and a student intern. We also have a part time person who acts as a triage and does the intake in order to distribute the cases to the staff."

Mr. Elliott said, "The majority of the cases we handle come through the

(Continued on page 3)

(Disability Connection continued from page 2)

phone. We are located in downtown Pittsburgh so we get some walk ins, and we get very few email requests. We work with people on a case-by-case basis and our involvement is really dictated by the individual. Some people need more hands-on engagement where as others need a referral to the appropriate agency and then they move on. We serve about 100 people a month and we have been able to build in a system of follow up. People we work with receive a consumer survey on their satisfaction with our service. If a consumer is unable to get his or her needs met for one reason or another, then we do more research to solve the problem. We work closely with agencies we refer our consumers to and many of these agencies have representatives that serve on our advisory committee."

Ms. Barricella added, "We have been able to monitor our progress through consumer surveys. The surveys get returned to the GOHCR and according to the feedback, we are doing really well. The only time we have not had positive responses is when we find that the resources



From left to right, Disability Connection staff members Joe Elliott, Resource Center Manager, Johanna Kerner, Information and Referral Specialist and Steve Chopek, Regional Housing Coordinator

needed simply aren't out there."

Housing

Mr. Elliott continued, "Although the Link does not focus solely on housing, approximately 42 percent of our phone calls that come in are related to housing issues. We get questions about everything. People call because they can't afford their apartment and are facing eviction, they need to find a first month's rent and/or security deposit, they are looking to move and they need help, or their house is being foreclosed. We get questions about HUD, locating accessible

housing, landlord tenant issues, how to get support services, and how to physically move someone from one location to another. One of the biggest challenges we have is finding accessible housing. Many vacancies that we learn about may not be accessible or they may be in a location that is undesirable. We created a bank of localized subsidized housing properties. We also receive a bi-weekly rental sheet of available market rate units from Pittsburgh Community Services. We also have access to our own in-house resource. The Disability Connection

(Continued on page 4)

(Disability Connection continued from page 3)
 was selected to be one of five agencies in the state to participate in the Regional Housing Coordinator program. Steve Chopek is our Regional Housing Coordinator (RHC) for the South West Region and works with the Disability Connection. He has been a great help for us in terms of housing.”

Ms. Barricella stated, “The RHC program, which facilitates access to housing options and opportunities for people with disabilities, was a perfect complement for The Disability Connection. The RHC and the grant have allowed us to help more people, especially with housing. The highest need is always housing. It seems that there are more accessible units out there

than people know about and the RHC has helped us do the research to find out about those apartments.”

With the addition of the Allegheny Link and the RHC, Ms. Barricella has seen the agency grow and reach more and more people. “In 2000, I was the only staff member. In addition to me, we now have five staff members, four fulltime and one part time, which includes our recently hired fulltime Intensive Case Manager. This has been very helpful because we really needed someone to give people the ongoing help and supports in order to live independently. As a staff we function as a team, we meet weekly and we know what everyone else is doing. This approach really

benefits our consumers.”

Contact Information

Anyone is welcome to contact the Disability Connection. In order to spread the word about their services, staff attend public meetings and resource and health fairs, and they have received press coverage in the newspaper and on television.

To learn more, contact The Disability Connection at 1-877-755-5222 or visit their website at www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs/disabilityconnection.aspx.

To learn more about the Allegheny Link, call 1-866-730-2368 or TTY 412-350-5205 or visit their website at www.alleghenylink.org.

Save The Date

Friday October 29th, 2007 7:00 P.M.

The Self Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania and Residential Living Options, Inc. present a special fundraising event:

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

A NIGHT OF BLUES KICKIN' GUMBO

With the "Sauce Boss" Bill Wharton and "Crabmeat" Jerry Thompson.

The Village Room Lionville, PA

A New Journey

By Peggy Robertson

Part of the American with Disabilities Act definition of an individual with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities are the most basic activities that the average person can perform with little or no difficulty. These activities include, but are not limited to, walking, seeing, learning, working, performing manual tasks, speaking, and hearing.

Ten years ago Sandy Koder suffered a stroke which set off a number of physical impairments. She was at a restaurant and during her meal felt like something wasn't right. She was having a hard time swallowing her food and as she was leaving the restaurant and going out to the car, collapsed in her husband's arms. She was taken to the hospital, where she suffered a major stroke. As a result, her left side became weak and limited. Even after she started taking medication, her left leg was still weak and she was having trouble reading and writing and



An inside railing was installed down the length of the hallway.

comprehending.

Prior to her stroke, Sandy used to work at a bank, she taught sign language, she was president of a mother's club and lived a very full life. Since the stroke, her level of activity declined. She could no longer drive and has had difficulty walking. She had a chemical imbalance, was put on medication, but wasn't getting any better. Sandy commented, "Even after physical therapy I had difficulty with my left leg. I feel like I got my parts from a junk yard!"

She then had an MRI of her brain which showed little white dots indicating damaged brain cells. The neurologist told Sandy

that she had suffered many minor strokes without even knowing it and now had Cerebral Vascular Disease. Her neurologist subsequently prescribed a blood thinning medication.

She and her husband rented a ranch home in Red Hill, PA. Although it was all on one floor, the bathroom tub and sink were not accessible and there was no railing leading up to the front door, which was one and a half steps from the pavement. One Christmas Sandy was carrying a package into the house and fell backwards onto the pavement. She has fallen many times since then.

As if Sandy's life wasn't

(Continued on page 6)

(A New Journey continued from page 5)
 complicated enough, in 2003 she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had to have a mastectomy. Because of all the medications that she was taking she was not able to undergo chemotherapy. And then, after 43 happy years of marriage, Sandy's husband died in May of 2006. "I was in such shock. And I knew that I would not be able to stay in the house in Red Hill because it was in a rural area and far from my friends and family. My husband helped me and drove me every where. Fortunately, my brother

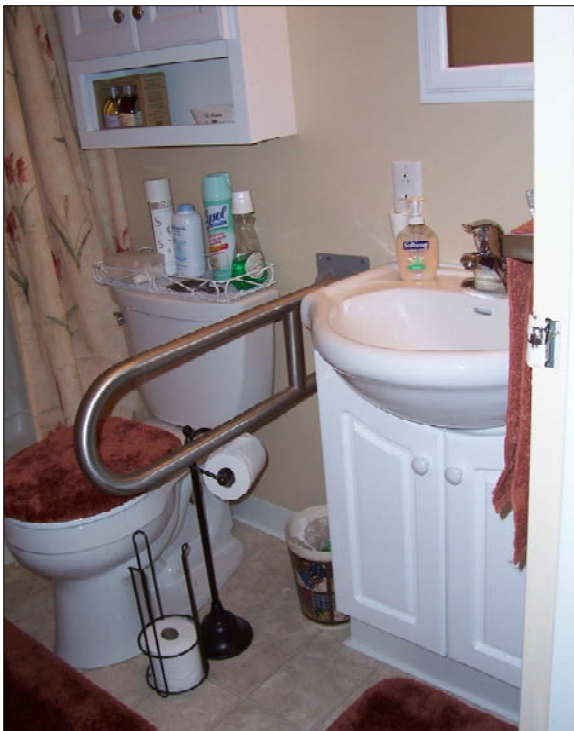
owned a condominium in North Wales which is near where he and my mother live and near my friends and my parish. The previous tenants renting from my brother gave notice that they were moving out and the timing could not have been better. I moved into the condo in September and pay rent to my brother. It worked out well."

Sandy's brother, Charlie Corrado, knew that Sandy couldn't move into any place but his, however he did not have the money to remodel it. Mr. Corrado explained, "I

spent a lot of time trying to find someone who could help Sandy. Finally, a social service organization referred me to SDHP. I spoke to Gail Hoffmann, Executive Director of SDHP, and explained Sandy's circumstances. She then sent us an application form for their home modifications program. We were thrilled to find out Sandy was eligible."

After Sandy was approved for the grant, Pat Nunan, Independent Living Specialist with Life Styles Designs, and Tracy Beck, Executive Director

(Continued on page 7)



On the left, the sink has room for a wheel chair underneath and a pull down bar was installed next to the toilet. On the right, the shower is easy to get into and is equipped with a handrail and a shower seat .

(A New Journey continued from page 6)

of Residential Living Options, Inc., made an initial visit to assess what modifications would best meet Sandy's needs. Ms. Nunan said, "Tracy finds out about the medical needs and I do the measurements and figure out the construction needed. In addition to making the bathroom accessible, we added a grab bar to the right of the front door underneath the doorbell so that Sandy would have something to hold on to as she was going through the door. The inside railing down the length of the hallway into the condo really made a big difference and has helped prevent Sandy from falling once she is in her home."

Sandy noted, "Some of the modifications may seem minor, but are critical for a person with a mobility impairment. For example, the front door handle was replaced with one that has a universal design to make it easier to open. New switch lights were put in and as soon as I walk into the front door, there is a twelve foot wooden railing attached to the wall on

the right so that I can easily walk into my home without falling. But I am absolutely thrilled with how the bathroom was remodeled. The sink comes out so that a chair can fit underneath, there is a drop down grab bar between the sink and the toilet, and an exhaust fan and heater were installed. The shower is now totally accessible, easy to get into and has a fold down seat. The first shower that I took I just stood in there and cried because I felt so secure. I knew I was safe being in there by myself, I had a seat to sit on and handles to help me get in and out. I really appreciate all of these modifications, they have really improved the quality of my life."

Sandy added, "Without my husband and living in a new home, my life has been very different. Because of the modifications, I realize I can live my own life and be independent. For example, I am eligible for TransNet (Suburban Transit Network, Inc.) which is a reduced fare service for senior citizens over the age of 65. I have to schedule

the day before and they stop running at 4:00 P.M., but I use them to take me to my doctor appointments. I am careful not to get too comfortable and think that I can do more than I really can. I don't want to get hurt. I want to be in my home for as long as I can. And if anyone can be helped by my story, that will be my part. I want people to know that there are options and even with physical disabilities, they can live on their own."

Mr. Corrado said, "Getting the bathroom done was the key to everything. We are so grateful for everything. All of the people we worked with at SDHP were wonderful. This program allows someone to continue to have a full life despite her disabilities. And we haven't gotten any bills...the grant paid for everything!"

Although the project came in under budget and took only 2 ½ months to complete from start to finish, there was one complication. Ms. Nunan explained, "When we pulled out the old sink the wall that it had

(Continued on page 9)

Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania receives 2007 Inglis Award for Continuing Excellence

The Board of Directors of the Self-Determination Housing Project, Inc. (SDHP) is pleased to announce that the organization received a 2007 Inglis Award for Continuing Excellence. The Inglis Foundation awards program honors non-profit organizations in the Philadelphia region that enhance the quality of life for people with physical disabilities, and by doing so supports the Inglis mission.

The Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania, Inc., one of four organizations to receive a 2007 Inglis Award for Continuing Excellence, is a non-profit organization that works to expand housing options and promote self-determination and control in housing for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania.

According to Gail Hoffmann, SDHP Executive Director, "We are so thrilled to

receive this grant of \$20,000. We are grateful to the Inglis Foundation for their support and proud to partner with them to help meet the needs of people with disabilities. This award will help us continue to improve housing choice for people with disabilities by addressing the service gaps and barriers they face."

The award winning programs were honored on June 19, 2007, at a ceremony at Inglis House, Philadelphia, PA. Janet Ries Stern, Inglis Foundation Board Director and Chairman of the Awards Review Committee, commented, "The Awards were created so programs like the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania, Inc. – with a real vision for improving the lives of people with physical disabilities – can expand their efforts."

About the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania
Since 1994, SDHP has

been one of Pennsylvania's greatest voices supporting housing choice for people with disabilities. SDHP enhances the quality of life for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania by advocating for accessible, affordable housing for people with disabilities, most of whom are low- or moderate-income individuals. SDHP provides technical assistance and education to other agencies that serve people with disabilities on how to empower individuals to choose and control their own housing. SDHP also administers a home modification program that enables eligible low- and moderate-income persons with permanent disabilities to live independently in their own home by making it more accessible.

SDHP carries out its activities by working with the housing and disability communities

(Continued on page 9)

(Inglis Award continued from page 8)
and forming partnerships that help people with disabilities learn that choosing and controlling housing is a viable option. The long-term goal of SDHP is to continue building upon state efforts to increase access to integrated housing with appropriate supports and services as determined and

controlled by the person with a disability. The Inglis Award will support the successful continuation and expansion of SDHP's programs. For more information, visit the SDHP's website at: www.sdhp.org.

About Inglis Foundation
Inglis Foundation works with people with physical disabilities to create and

provide practical solutions so they may pursue their life goals.

All of Inglis' services and programs are designed to enable people with physical disabilities to enjoy life with the greatest amount of independence and mobility. For more information, visit the organization's website at: www.inglis.org.

(A New Journey continued from page 7)
been attached to was moldy. In addition, the flooring underneath had to be replaced. We therefore had to tear out the wall and replace it. The guys that did the construction really liked working with Sandy and her brother. I also found them to be exceptionally nice. And Sandy's brother took care of a lot of the paperwork with the condominium association. We got the building permits, but Mr. Corrado submitted a plan to have a curb stop removed and got all of the necessary approvals with the condominium. This was a case where the clients' participation in the project was very helpful."



Sandy Koder shows off her new accessible shower that was renovated through the SDHP Home Modification Program.

To learn more about eligibility requirements and to receive an application for the SDHP Home Modification Program, contact Celia Michl at 610-873-9595 or toll free at 877-550-7347.

Join Us for a Special Day

Wednesday, June 27th, 2007

Two afternoon sessions offered by the
Self Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania
at the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

2007 Housing Services Conference: *Exceeding Expectations*

A look at housing activity that has occurred since the inception of SDHP

1:30 - 3:00 P.M.: Spotlight on Housing for People with Disabilities

3:15 - 4:45 P.M.: Spotlight on the Future of Supportive Housing

Penn Stater Conference Center 215 Innovation Boulevard, State College, PA

For more information, call 1-877-850-7347 or email celia@sdhp.org.

HOMEWARDS is published by the Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania and made possible through generous support from the PA Developmental Disabilities Council and the PA Housing Finance Agency.

Executive Director: Gail Hoffmann

Newsletter Editor: Peggy Robertson

For more information, contact SDHP at: **SDHP**, 717 E. Lancaster Avenue, Downingtown, PA 19335

Telephone: 610-873-9595

Fax: 610-873-9597

Toll free: 877-550-7347

Website: www.sdhp.org

SDHP Board of Directors

John Tassone, President
James Gutowski, Vice President
Lynn Stewart, Treasurer
Tracy Beck, Secretary

Pamela Auer
Arthur Marzaldi
Lynne Miles
Corey Rowley
Richard Anthony Young
Gail Hoffmann,
Executive Director

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DOWNINGTOWN, PA
PERMIT NO. 251

Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania
717 East Lancaster Avenue
Downingtown, PA 19335