We have enjoyed a mild winter, but I am ready for spring. We just recently completed our strategic planning process for the next two years and have developed a rather ambitious plan that covers creating an environment to become the Employer of Choice, prepare for new service and support models and become the Provider of Choice, create an environment of fiscal sustainability, embrace a person centered and individual directed culture for the people we support and effectively manage the plan through monitoring and adaptation to produce an effective and resilient organization. We are hopeful this provides a roadmap for us as we prepare for the future and the challenges of increased demand for services within an environment of limited resources.

I continue to be very pleased with the direction that our organization is taking as a result of the merger. We are in a strong position fiscally with the merging of systems and streamlining our processes and have taken advantage of the expertise in both counties to improve our supports and services. Mergers continue to take place across NYS based on the fiscal challenges of the state and the limited resources we have been provided with over the last ten years. Currently there are eight Arc Chapters looking at mergers with three of them merging for the second time. We continue to be challenged with staffing vacancies but are working hard to improve our numbers. Our staff continue to be our greatest asset and daily demonstrate their dedication to meeting the needs and requests of those we support.

We face many challenges in this budget cycle. Over the last ten years like many not for profits we have received only one trend which was 2/10ths of one percent in 2012. The annual cola has been delayed each year except that one year. Other than several direct care increases that are restricted to staff in the direct support professional categories and the funding of minimum wage increases, our field has been provided with limited additional resources. We have benefited from some recent rate increases for our services but OPWDD is talking about a 2% cut July 1, 2020 to assist with the budget deficit. We need your support and may be reaching out to you to contact our legislators regarding the following issues: providing a 3% increase over the next 5 years to enable the not for profits to get some fiscal stability, improve infrastructure and prepare for managed care, stop the 2% cut we may be faced with in July 2020 and advocate for the continuation of the 14c certificate which allows a limited number of people in our work centers to be paid subminimum wage based on productivity.

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In regards to the 14c certificate, if this is ended, there are people in our work centers who are not capable of working in competitive employment who would lose the opportunity to work in our setting. We believe this is a choice that the person we support should make based on what they wish to do, not a government entity making that decision for them.

We thank all of you for your support, either through advocacy or through financial contributions. As you will note in another article, our capital campaign to renovate our main facility in Watertown is going well, but we still have a significant amount to raise. If you have not donated yet, please consider making a contribution that will impact those we support for years to come.

We continue to look at ways to make the Direct Support Professional position and its importance in the delivery of services more attractive. We are investigating starting an apprenticeship program through the Department of Labor and in conjunction with our local colleges. We continue to support continuing education and training and work is also being done on getting a Federal recognition of this position with the assignment of a job code through the Standard Occupational Classification system with our provider organizations. Our Direct Support Professional positions are not minimum wage jobs! They are positions that require a variety of skills to assist in meeting the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We will continue to advocate for funding and supports to enable us to pay our DSP staff a living wage that they deserve and require.

Thank you for being a part of our organization and thanks for your support.

Howie Ganter
February 25, 2020