



Spirit

Winter 2010

Planning for Our Future

Unity House develops its 2010-2012 Strategic Plan

Recognizing that thorough preparation is the key to continued excellence, Executive Director Liz Werner led the agency in a strategic planning event this fall. Strategic planning identifies where an organization wants to be in the future and how it is going to get there.

A team of approximately 35 staff, consumers, and board members met for three half-day sessions to think critically about the direction Unity House should take in the new decade. Consultant Renee Downey Hart facilitated a series of interactive activities that assessed the agency's strengths, defined pressing challenges and areas that need improvement, and determined top goals and priorities that must be addressed in order to ensure Unity House's continued success. The result was a strategic plan that will guide the agency for the next three years.

Mission, Vision & Values

The first step was to redefine the agency's mission and vision statements. Great mission statements are the brand of an institution and drive its purpose – it was crucial to capture the essence of Unity House's fundamental purpose and philosophy in a clear, succinct declaration.

After much dialog, a new mission statement was agreed upon: "Unity House's mission is to empower and enrich the lives of people in recovery, coping with a mental illness, and/or diagnosed with a developmental disability. This is accomplished by offering services and supports in an inclusive, person-centered environment."

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Once the mission was fine tuned, a vision statement quickly followed. This phrase describes what success will look like once the mission is fulfilled: "All individuals are respected and lead lives of personal fulfillment and acceptance within our community."

Defining our core values in just a couple of words was a challenge. After careful consideration, the planning group selected *honesty*, *integrity*, and *respect* to express those values we hold most dear.

The Strategic Plan

The 2010-2012 Strategic Plan was developed over the next two sessions. Key elements upon which we will concentrate over the next three years are (in no particular order):

- Staffing
- Consumer Advisory Panel
- Volunteerism
- Infrastructure
- Wellness
- Fiscal Health
- Technology

The agency's administrative team is developing an action plan to implement these seven elements. Point persons will be identified for each area, goals will be prioritized, and expected outcomes and timelines will be established.

The planning process is never truly done, and execution of the 2010-2012 Strategic Plan will evolve over the next 36 months. Progress will be frequently assessed and shared periodically.

“All individuals are respected and lead lives of personal fulfillment and acceptance within our community.”

Respect

Honesty

Integrity



Spirit

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Executive Director's Perspective

The second half of 2009 flew by and the high level of energy and momentum at Unity House has brought us into a new year and a new decade. A number of exciting initiatives and events have taken place since the last issue of *Spirit*, and I am delighted to share news from the agency.

Progress continues at our new Catherwood Road location in Ithaca. Renovations are well underway, and we anticipate that day hab, along with our central Tompkins County operations, will move in this month. Unity Employment Services in Geneva has new space as well – last fall, they moved from West Washington Street to the Geneva Enterprise Development Center, situated in the old American Can Building at 122 N. Genesee Street. And finally, I'm pleased to report that Unity House has been approved to establish a supportive living IRA in Skaneateles. A house has been purchased and is being remodeled. If all goes according to plan, four young women from the immediate area will move in by Memorial Day.

Despite the weak economy, GRACE House experienced growth in 2009. The agency was approached by the Cayuga County Community Services Board, which had identified increased need for services for people in recovery. With their support, our program has been certified for and is ready to fill five additional beds – three for adults and two for a parent-child family unit. This expansion has created a new job opportunity as well. GRACE House was fortunate to also receive a \$50,000 maintenance grant from the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services for a complete renovation of the kitchen and men's bathroom facilities.




Liz Werner, Executive Director

"Compassion and caring - for our consumers and our staff - are the heart of Unity House. As always, your support will be appreciated as we weather this storm."

The recession has touched most Americans, and sadly, Unity House is not exempt from the fallout. For the first time in my tenure with the agency, we are experiencing cuts to our long-established revenues. While we've certainly seen our fair share of revenue freezes over the years, our existing income has never before been touched. These difficult times call for us to increase efficiencies in our daily work. My goal is to avoid cutting services and jobs if at all possible. We will think creatively and strategically as we look for other ways to curtail expenses and raise private funds. Compassion and caring – for our consumers and our staff – are the heart of Unity House. As always, your support will be appreciated as we weather this storm.

Yet even in the face of these challenges, the commitment and dedication of our board of directors and employees were evident during our strategic planning sessions last fall. This process allowed us to refocus and set a course of action for the next three years. One element of the 2010-2012 Strategic Plan is a focus on wellness. Like many, I struggle with healthy eating, exercise, and taking care of myself. But I know that in caring for ourselves, others reap the benefits as well. Healthy, happy people translate into healthy, happy employees, which in turn impacts morale.

The new decade holds great promise for Unity House. Thank you for your continued caring and support, and best wishes for 2010.



National Recognition



Long-time employee Susan Sloan has received the national Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioner (CPRP) credential. Susan is the director of the Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation Treatment and Drop-In Center in Auburn.

“This national credential is a significant accomplishment for Susan and for Unity House,” said Executive Director Liz Werner. “Obtaining this certification validates all the good work Susan has been doing for over ten years, and I recognize that the strength of the agency’s mental health program is largely due to Susan’s leadership. She truly embraces the philosophy of psychiatric rehabilitation, and is one of the most compassionate people I know.”

Only 2,600 individuals across the nation have earned CPRP certification, issued by the U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association. Practitioners all over the U.S. and Canada consider the CPRP the crowning achievement of their career; it signifies a deep commitment to the principles of person-centered recovery that form the core of the psychiatric rehabilitation ethos.

“Psych rehab is about helping those with mental illness feel comfortable in their own skin, reducing their suffering, and increasing their happiness and satisfaction in life,” said Susan. “Knowing that what we do here at Unity House is recognized nationally has broadened my view of psych rehab in all aspects of mental health.”

Grants and Gifts

Unity House is the grateful recipient of funding from these sources:

Verizon Foundation – \$6,000

Under the direction of Director Susan Sloan, Unity House’s Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitative Treatment (IPRT) program will use these funds to enhance existing curriculum developed by the NYS Office of Mental Health entitled “Wellness Self-Management.” The current curriculum focuses on work and life skills; this grant will allow IPRT to improve the course of study by adding special emphasis on computer-based learning, conducting job searches, online banking and financial management, avoiding Internet fraud, making wise energy choices, increasing marketplace awareness, and more.

These funds were secured with the support of Verizon’s Government and External Affairs Vice President Sam Caldwell. A special check presentation was made on December 4 at the Wright Avenue offices.



Bradford N. Froude Trust – \$55,336

This generous gift was left to Unity House unexpectedly by the late Bradford and Anne Froude of Chandler, Ariz., who named the agency in a trust they created in 1992. Little is known of the Froudes – Mrs. Froude was a New York native and Unity House’s share of their estate is in memory of Martin F. Hickey.

New York State Department of Transportation – \$91,218

Our successful application has been approved for funding as part of a \$8.3 million grant administered by the Federal Transit Administration. Once final paperwork is in order, Unity House will purchase two Type 1 handicapped-accessible mini buses for transportation of consumers. Both 12-passenger vans will have hydraulic wheelchair lifts.



Celebrating Success

Jimmie Lehto - Balance is Everything

Good balance is important – whether it's on the ski slopes or in daily life. And Dryden resident Jimmie Lehto seems to be getting the hang of it!

Jimmie came to Unity House in May of 2006. After graduating from BOCES with his individualized education program (IEP) diploma that June, Jimmie sought employment. He has held several different jobs, including positions at WalMart and Ithaca College. He now works at Finger Lakes Fresh, a division of Challenge Industries in Ithaca which uses a workforce of employees with disabilities to provide high quality, local vegetables grown year-round in a hydroponics greenhouse. Jimmie has been there almost a year and really enjoys his work.

During his time with Unity House, Jimmie has struggled with non-epileptic seizures, yet in recent months has had excellent reports from his neurologist with no episodes. "Jimmie has made great progress in managing his seizures and meds," said Dryden Residence Counselor Shaena Anderson. "Since coming to Unity House, Jimmie has become increasingly responsible and is now able to administer his own meds with weekly supervision. He has been

error-free with this, which is very encouraging and a big ego boost."

According to Shaena, Jimmie is a "fun, caring, and active person who enjoys sports and spending time with his family." In fact, he just took up skiing through the nearby Greek Peak Adaptive Snowsports Program, which teaches skiing to those with disabilities. Their goal is to make the mountain and the excitement of snowsports available to everyone.

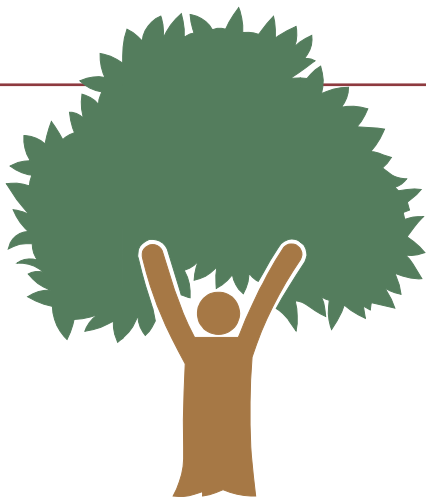
"It's not that easy," says Jimmie. "You fall a lot but it's something different." Jimmie got interested in the program through one of his housemates – they go weekly and take lessons with a specially trained coach. "It's good for balance. I'm staying on the easiest slopes this year, and will hit the blue [intermediate] runs next year."

In addition to fun on the ski hill, Jimmie set a goal to get his driver's permit, and was successful last June. Now he's signed up for a driver's education class and is studying to get his license. Jimmie also enjoys break dancing at local dances, and recently started doing his own independent grocery shopping. Because he's doing so well, Jimmie will soon



transfer into a supportive living apartment in Ithaca, where he will live independently with regularly scheduled support visits from Unity House staff. In anticipation of that exciting life change, Jimmie is shopping for a couch for his new pad.

"While he's still learning to balance everything himself, Jimmie has made amazing progress at Unity House," said Shaena. "I hope that he will continue to strive for success and accomplish all of his goals and dreams."



Save A Tree - Go Paperless!

This newsletter is available electronically. If you'd prefer to "go green" (and save Unity House money!) by receiving Unity House news through e-mail, please let us know. Contact us at kbuck@unityhouse.com with your e-mail address and we'll add you to our new e-mailing list.

In addition to three issues of *Spirit* and the annual report, you'll also receive occasional news releases and updates from Unity House. We promise not to fill up your in box or sell or share your contact information with anyone outside the agency. Our printed publications are also available for viewing and download at www.unityhouse.com.

Tops Never Stops

Continuing in its role of good community neighbor, Tops Friendly Markets on Genesee Street in Auburn made a gift of \$500 to Unity House on January 6, which Executive Director Liz Werner accepted on behalf of the agency. The store was celebrating its grand re-opening, marking the completion of a \$3 million renovation project and the installation of a gas station. Five non-profit agencies and a number of business and civic leaders were invited to the festivities.



Healthy Living, Happy Staff

Unity House remains committed to creating a culture of health and well-being throughout the agency. A non-smoking policy took effect at the beginning of the new year, Unity House has contracted with a new Employee Assistance Program that offers comprehensive resources for staff and administrators, and a Wellness Committee has been formed as part of the agency's 2010-2012 Strategic Plan.

Wellness is an active process that allows one to make positive choices; individuals assume personal responsibility for their own mental and physical fitness. Through the new committee, Unity House will encourage healthy personal lifestyle choices, provide education and resources, and launch a variety of wellness initiatives.

The mission of the Wellness Committee is to promote a healthy lifestyle within ourselves and our community by providing education, resources, and advocacy for health promotion initiatives.

Human Resources Manager Sara Glauberman and Assistant Program Director Jessica Janssen are co-chairs of the new Wellness Committee, and have pulled together a representative cross-section of agency staff to move the program forward. The committee has already met to establish their mission, and is conducting an agency-wide contest for a logo and tag line that will visually identify wellness initiatives at Unity House.

The Unity House Wellness Committee:

Co-Chairs

Sara Glauberman
Jessica Janssen

Members

Kelly Antonacci
Aaron Brozon
Christine Farrell
Judy Fisher
Wytheria Harriett
Tim Laird
Michele Leonello
Molly Malone
Matt McElwain
Suzanne McMaster
Mary Jo Norfolk
Louis Pelino
Doreen Vanacore



Holiday Art Contest

To spur creativity and imagination amongst consumers, Unity House for the first time this year sponsored a holiday art contest. All consumers were invited to submit original artwork with a holiday or winter theme for judging. The winning selection was featured on the front of the agency's greeting card.

Artist Jim Duplessis got the nod this year with his lovely painting of three decorated trees. Executive Director Liz Werner presented Jim with his prize – a framed reproduction of his winning submission.

The art contest will become an annual event. The agency had the original piece framed and it will be the first in a new collection that will grace the large conference room at Wright Avenue.

Jim Duplessis is the winner of Unity House's first consumer holiday art contest. His submission was chosen for the agency's greeting card.

Advocating for MRDD

Legislative Day took place in Albany on January 26, and four Unity House representatives travelled to the state capital to speak out against proposed reductions to the Mental Retardation and Developmental Disability (MRDD) budget. Director of Marketing and Development Kelly Buck, Assistant Program Director Jessica Janssen, direct care professional Trisha Loveland, and consumer Lyn

are struggling with the same challenges that are impacting organizations and businesses across the nation, and have been deeply affected by past funding cuts, rising costs due to inflation, and huge increases in the cost of health care for employees. Unity House is facing a 4% decrease in funding for its day habilitation programs, a 3% cut to its supportive IRAs, and an 18% reduction to Medicaid service coordination.



Unity House reps met with Assemblyman Gary Finch (R-123) in Albany. Left to right: Trisha Loveland, Lyn DiVietro, Mr. Finch, Jessica Janssen and Kelly Buck.

DiVietro met with lawmakers to applaud them for recommending a Medicaid trend factor for 2010 and to urge them to oppose cuts to the MRDD budget for 2010-2011.

Legislative Day is sponsored annually by the New York State Association of Community and Residential Agencies (NYSACRA). The association has a long history in helping to transform the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families. NYSACRA's 200 member agencies serve approximately 140,000 New Yorkers with disabilities and employ roughly 65,000 direct support staff. These member agencies

Representatives from more than 50 member agencies descended on Albany to make their voices heard in support of the consumers they serve and the direct care staff they employ. NYSACRA kicked off the morning with remarks from OMRDD Commissioner Diana Ritter and several other lawmakers who support the agenda. Following the rally, meetings were scheduled with representatives from each agency's respective district. Unity House reps had the opportunity to speak with Assemblyman Gary Finch (R-123), and aides for Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (D-125) and Senators David Valesky (D-49) and George Winner (R-53).



“We urged them to reconsider making significant cuts to our budgets

– the services we provide are essential, not optional,” said Kelly. “As a private, non-profit agency, Unity House has no fat to trim; past cuts have already taken their toll and we simply must have appropriate funding from the state to continue providing the supports our consumers depend on. We also must have the resources to pay our direct care staff a living wage. It takes a special type of person to provide the care we give to our consumers – they need to be adequately compensated.”

In the face of significant state budget deficits, all who support Unity House and seek to curb proposed cuts are urged to contact their local representatives:

**www.nysenate.gov/senators or
<http://assembly.state.ny.us/>.**



Join Our Team!

Seeking meaningful employment with competitive salary and good benefits? Join our team! Unity House is looking for caring individuals who are interested in working with those with mental health illnesses, developmental disabilities, and/or chemical dependencies. A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, Unity House partners with these individuals to develop their personal skills and potential, enabling them to live more full and independent lives.

View our current job listings and complete an online application at www.unityhouse.com/employment/employment.asp.

Live United

The United Way of Cayuga County kicked off its annual fundraising campaign on September 15. The United Way's purpose is to solicit, collect, and disperse monies for charitable, philanthropic, benevolent, and community purposes. Their 2009 goal: \$1,285,000.

Even in these tough times, the United Way exceeded its goal by \$45,000, closing out at \$1,330,415. Of this money, Unity House's women's and children's supportive living program received \$5717; Unity House is one of approximately 25 local organizations that benefits from the United Way's generosity.

The United Way reports that about 32 million individuals – one out of

every three people employed in the United States – contribute to the United Way each year. Many give through their place of employment. Kudos to GRACE House Director Michele Leonello for her diligence in soliciting contributions from Unity House employees – thanks to her good work, the agency received a special award at the campaign closing celebration on December 8 indicating that Unity House increased its overall donations by 26% this year! The plaque Michele accepted on behalf of Unity House is now hung in the small conference room at 34 Wright Avenue.



GRACE House Program Manager Pam O'Conner and Executive Director Liz Werner celebrate United Way's successful campaign.

A Haunted Autumn



The second annual chicken barbecue fundraiser took place at the Union Springs fire hall on Halloween day. Firefighters volunteered their time to cook 250 chicken halves, consumers in costume washed cars and sold baked goods, and raffle tickets were sold for a chance to win a 26" flat screen HD television. The event raised nearly \$2,200 to benefit the annual consumer appreciation dinner that will be held later this spring. Special thanks to our sponsors: Johnston Paper, Gerry Crowley, the Union Springs fire department, BJ's Wholesale Club, The Apple Station, C. Janssen Excavation, and Advanced Auto Parts.

Direct care provider Victoria Jones and consumer James Green have fun washing cars together in costume during the Halloween fundraising barbecue in Union Springs.

Unity House opened a new individualized residential alternative (IRA) on Hector Street in Ithaca last summer, and the residents put on an open house to welcome friends to their new home. Four women now live in the residence, and a number of staff, family members, and friends stopped by on October 23 to wish them well.



The consumers at the new Hector Street IRA in Ithaca put on quite a spread for their open house celebration in October.

The Day Habilitation Center in Auburn sponsored a cleverly spooky haunted house. Consumers and staff dressed in costume and were scattered throughout the facility, acting out Auburn-specific vignettes. The ambitious undertaking was organized by staff dressed up as "cereal" killers; the walk-through ended with a consumer's dance rendition of Michael Jackson's "Thriller."

Admission was a canned good for the local Calvary Food Pantry.



Beverly Lader and Martha Bishop are ready for trick or treating at the Halloween extravaganza put on by Day Hab at 31 Market Street, Auburn.

We're Smoke-Free!



Unity House is now a smoke-free workplace. Executive Director Liz Werner announced last fall that the agency would incorporate a non-smoking policy as part of its new wellness program; the policy took effect on January 1.

“Unity House is purposely working to foster a culture of well-being for our staff and our consumers, and it was necessary to look at smoking as part of our overall wellness program,” said Liz. “Health insurance costs continue to climb, and we believe a thoughtfully designed and executed wellness program will help control those costs in the long run. Unity House must do all it can to promote healthy living, and a smoke-free work environment was the next logical step.”

“Unity House saved my life. If it wasn't for the agency saying 'no,' I wouldn't have quit smoking. I know I'll never go back, ever.”

Candi Saxman, program manager at Danby IRA.

Unity House's smoking rules have evolved over the years. The new expanded policy was developed to comply with the 2003 New York State Clean Indoor Air Act, and states that: “...all areas of the workplace and/or worksites are smoke/tobacco free without exception.”

Approximately one-third of the agency's 300 employees are directly affected by the change. The Human Resources Department is making information available to all employees about smoking cessation programs, wellness rewards, reimbursement accounts, and more. “My Smoke-Free Future,” a free program employees may access online through the Mayo Clinic, will be introduced this spring. The program includes a weight management component, another health consideration for smokers seeking to quit.

“We anticipate that a healthier workforce will mean a happier workforce,” said Liz. “By providing information and training opportunities that allow our staff to make better choices in self-care, we situate everyone for success. And ultimately our consumers will benefit as well – they thrive under the care of vibrant, happy, healthy staff.”

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