

communityconnections

The Newsletter of St. John's Community Services

weathering the storm

SJCS Makes Adjustments During Economic Downturn

According to a recent article in the *Washington Post*, by June 19, 2009, \$29 billion in assistance had been issued to states to support them during our recent severe economic downturn. Of particular interest to the SJCS family is the fact that over 90% of those dollars were spent by the states on their Medicaid programs.

Why is this of interest? Because approximately 82-85% of SJCS's annual budget is comprised of Medicaid funding. In the next fiscal year, states will be eligible to receive only half as much money through the federal stimulus program as this fiscal year. With housing values remaining depressed, states will also experience lower revenue for sales and property tax collections. With unemployment remaining high, both states and the federal government will experience decreased income tax revenue. Thus the budget picture looks very grim for next year in all of our states.

While this outlook concerns us at SJCS, we are doing what we always do - planning carefully, keeping our eyes on quality as our first priority and looking for efficiencies as well as new opportunities. Here are just a few of the strategies that we are employing:

- Smart Growth – SJCS is seeking growth opportunities in new service areas such as Case Management for seniors and people with physical disabilities in TN, In-Home Support in VA, home schooling in DC and vocational rehabilitation in PA.
- Controlling Healthcare Costs – An agency-wide wellness committee has been working for over a year to identify ways to improve employee health status and reduce health insurance costs. All of the states are working hard to change their behavior so that healthy eating and exercise become a standard part of their culture.
- Achieving Operational Efficiencies –
 - Targeting financial “problem” areas and implementing specific, individualized plans for resolution within set timeframes
 - Managing meeting costs – increasing the use of teleconferencing and webinars to reduce travel costs
 - Transitioning to electronic record keeping (See “Therap”, p.3)

SJCS stakeholders can be certain that their valuable input will be solicited and is considered vital to the agency as we develop and implement our strategies for “weathering the storm”.

» SJCS Website Update

In order to more effectively market our services, SJCS has made changes to its website including adding more reader-friendly content, keywords, and new images. These incremental changes, though small to the average viewer, have successfully doubled traffic to the SJCS website in one year. That means that twice as many people—service recipients, staff, volunteers, donors, government agencies, collaborating organizations—are learning how to get involved with SJCS. To see the latest additions, visit www.sjcs.org. Have an idea on how to make it even better? Send your comments and suggestions to mritchie@sjcs.org.



INSIDE

- Alexa's Story | Community Support
- Tom's Message | Therap
- Kentu's Story | Board of Trustees

advancing community support and opportunities for people living with disabilities

alexa goes to school

Learning and Growing with SJCS

In the spring of 2008, when Alexa's family first visited the St. John's Community Services classroom at Shaed Elementary School in Washington, DC, they didn't know what to expect. Alexa, a beautiful five-year-old child with autism, had never been in a classroom setting and had little experience with other children. At the time, she exhibited little speech and language capability.

“For us to have found St. John's, where [Alexa] can learn and interact with other children in the community has been a wonderful experience.”

Yet, from the moment Alexa entered the classroom, she became animated at this whole new experience—the colors of the room, the dolls, the games

and learning exercises, the uniforms, the daily structure of activities, and the caring teachers and new classmates. Any early anxieties the family may have had were replaced by feelings of wonder, joy and excitement. “When your child has a disability, you feel so isolated and alone,” says Alexa's mom, Renee. “So for us to have found St. John's, where she can learn and interact with other children in the community and be supported by a diverse staff, has been a wonderful experience.”

Now, a little over one year after enrolling in the SJCS class, Alexa shows growth in so many areas. She has learned to manage her personal belongings, eat meals independently, and remain attentive to classroom instruction.

continued on next page



Alexa with her teacher, Chika



Thomas F. Wilds, President/CEO

Tom's Message

This issue of Community Connections focuses on the challenges we face today and what we are doing about them. These challenges include the severe economic downturn, government rate reductions, cutbacks in community services, greater competition for fewer jobs, and major losses in foundation and private financial resources.

As in the past, St. John's has planned ahead, not only to “weather the storm” (see p. 1) but to position ourselves so that we are prepared to grow and prosper as conditions improve. A central component of this preparation is building internal, state of the art systems that add efficiencies and service quality.

We not only are meeting standards set by the government and CARF Accreditation, but we employ our own internal compliance and quality standards that set the bar even higher. We have instituted an agency-wide computer system and are implementing the Therap (see p.3) client database system. Therap will replace paper records with a secure electronic means to track an individual's health needs and interventions. SJCS will, as always, support people with disabilities in the most cost-effective and efficient way so that they may live and participate in communities of their choosing.

kentu in the community

Making a Difference In the Philadelphia Area

When Kentu came to SJCS-PA seeking employment assistance, he had one major concern—getting and maintaining a job in his community. Now he's got more than he could ask for; Kentu has two jobs!



Kentu welcomes customers to Cosimo's

With the support of SJCS-PA Employment Specialists, Kentu found a job in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. Everyone was elated when

he was hired “on the hill” at Cosimo’s Pizza as a utilities attendant. Kentu walks to work in 25 minutes or catches the bus in front of his Germantown Avenue apartment building. The customers at Cosimo’s Pizza are Kentu’s neighbors, and he sees them several times a day as they eat lunch, wait for the bus, buy their morning cup of coffee, and frequent other Germantown Avenue businesses.

The job is a great match for Kentu because the restaurant is always bustling with customers and restaurant staff, and Kentu is such an outgoing young man. When asked what he likes about his job, Kentu states with a radiating ear-to-ear smile: “I like the customers and the people I work with, especially José and Mr. Enzo.”

This past January, Kentu began a second job in the pet supply department at Weaver’s Way—a local, community owned, natural food Co-Op in the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia. At Weaver’s Way, Kentu greets customers, answers customers’ questions, stocks, and helps with inventory. According to Cat, his

supervisor, “Kentu is a valued employee who has had a positive impact on everyone, and he is always included in all employee functions.”

Kentu has been such an outstanding employee that Cosimo’s has added an additional day to his schedule; Weaver’s Way is also considering increasing his hours. Kentu’s accomplishments reflect his hard work, opportunities provided by two local employers and the dedicated support of SJCS-PA’s Employment Services staff.

In addition to holding down two jobs, Kentu somehow finds the time to volunteer for the Democratic National Party. Acting on his beliefs is another attribute that makes Kentu special to all who know him. SJCS and the Philadelphia community are richer for having Kentu as part of their extended family.

alexa

continued from previous page

And most moving, according to her teachers and family, is that Alexa can now speak simple phrases, sight read fluently, and have fun with her classmates and other students in the school.

SJCS-DC Education Services creates a unique educational environment in which Alexa and her classmates can learn and grow. It features a 2 to 1 stu-

dent/teacher ratio, employs a total communication approach (e.g., pictures, spoken language and signing) as part of a multi-sensory model of instruction. In addition, the children are excited each September to join their peers in school-based courses such as physical education, music and art.

Alexa’s progress demonstrates

how much can be accomplished when a child is given the opportunity to participate in a community-based learning process with skilled teachers and children with and without disabilities.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Thomas F. Wilds, *President/CEO*

Mark J. Gold, *Chair*

Steven Raetzman, *Vice Chair*

Jeffrey S. Clark, *Treasurer*

Antonia Brathwaite-Fisher, *Secretary*

David P. Bennett

Grace Dempster

J. Nicoll Durrie, Jr.

Bruce Finland

E.C. Robertson, Jr.

Merriellou Symes

Matthew J. Wright

Reverend Luis León, *honorary member*



therap

An Electronic Database Management System Comes to SJCS

With the growing number of challenges agency-wide and in each of our state affiliates, working efficiently and effectively has become more important than ever before. In the technology arena, St. John's Community Services is preparing to implement Therap, a new web-based data management system. Therap will enable SJCS to capture



and demonstrate "real time," up to the moment progress and efficiencies for individuals supported as well as entire programs.

Therap Services, LLC., recognized globally, is a web-based organization that provides integrated documentation and communication solutions for agencies supporting people with disabilities. Therap offers efficient electronic alternatives to time-consuming manual record-keeping and storage that generate immense amounts of paper files, prone to errors and mis-filing. Therap has implemented services in over thirty-five states in the United States, as well as in Bangladesh and Nepal.

The implementation of Therap will move SJCS into the forefront of cutting-edge technology usage, vastly strengthening its network of support for people with disabilities. The benefits of Therap include:

- Use of one comprehensive, secure system without duplication and inefficiencies.
- Greater accuracy of reports and improved timelines.

- Immediately accessible updates in the system.
- Increased communication among direct support staff, administrators, parents and state personnel.
- Notification of medical appointments and follow up to staff, nurses and/or supervisors.
- Secure access of information that can be viewed and communicated from anywhere.
- Organization data tracked and trends identified by states, incidents or individuals and/or staff.
- Safety status of the all SJCS sites and vehicles, as well as our response to fire and disaster drills, made readily available to agency and state safety committees.

Once implemented, Therap will create unparalleled efficiencies. Analysis and early detection of areas of concern will allow SJCS to develop strategies quickly, share findings and implement corrective strategies. As a result, data will be securely managed, costs will be reduced, and repeated deficiencies minimized, while prompt response times will result in improved care. In addition, Therap applications are designed to meet Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and other security and privacy requirements. Finally, as SJCS gains proficiency with Therap solutions, it will be in a more advantageous position to identify opportunities for the provision of new and expanded services.

new initiatives

SJCS Receives Financial and Community Support to Launch New Services

During the past year, SJCS in Tennessee and Pennsylvania identified the need to introduce new services to their constituents—Case Management and Community Participation, respectively. If it were not for the financial support received by the Assisi Foundation of Memphis and the community support of a select group of organizations in Philadelphia, neither of these services would have launched. Because of their generosity and civic spirit, both are thriving today.

The Assisi Foundation of Memphis, Inc.

In 2008, a \$50,000 grant given by The Assisi Foundation enabled SJCS-TN to initiate Case Management Services for seniors and people 21 years or older with a physical disability in the Memphis area. With the help of the Assisi Foundation, SJCS-TN Case Management provides a critical referral service that enables people to remain in their home environments for as long as possible.

The largesse of the Assisi Foundation can be traced back to 2003 when they provided a \$7,400 grant to fund the lease of a car for use by the RN who supported both Memphis and Jackson. Later, in 2005, the Foundation awarded a \$20,000 grant to support nursing services and medical supplies for residents in Memphis and Jackson, and continuing education for SJCS-TN nursing staff.

Since its formation in March 1994, The Assisi Foundation has awarded over one hundred million dollars to non-profit organizations serving people located primarily in Memphis, TN, and the mid-south. The Foundation's areas of interest include Healthcare and Human Services, Education and Literacy, Social Justice/Ethics, Cultural Enrichment and the Arts.

Community Organizations in Philadelphia

Building on its respected Employment Services, SJCS-PA received the encouragement and funding to introduce Community Participation (Adult Day Services) in the Philadelphia community. A central aspect of Community Participation is providing opportunities for participants to volunteer for non-profit organizations. Volunteering enables individuals to serve the community, further develop their social skills and build a resume for future employment.

The following non-profit and citywide agencies came to the forefront and worked with SJCS-PA staff to create volunteer opportunities to help launch Community Participation:

- **Speaking for Ourselves** offers advocacy and public education for and by people with disabilities.
- **The Ridge Center** is a multi-service homeless facility for adult men funded by the City of Philadelphia.
- **People for People, Inc.** provides education, job training and children's education to Philadelphia's underserved population.
- **Carousel House** provides social, recreation and education services to persons with disabilities in the Philadelphia area.
- **Center in the Park** is a community center in NW Philadelphia supporting the needs of older people.
- **Mount Airy Counsel**, run by the Germantown Church of the Brethren nuns, provides food and recreation services for underserved school age children over the summer.
- **The Philadelphia Libraries** offers a full array of educational programs and services.

If not for the financial and community support of our dedicated partners, St. John's Community Services would not be able to provide our quality services or meet new and emerging service needs for people with disabilities.

**HOME OFFICE**

2201 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Suite C-150
Washington, DC 20007

800.869.3393
202.237.6500
202.237.6352 / fax

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

2201 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Suite 120
Washington, DC 20007

202.274.3459
202.337.5459 / fax

PENNSYLVANIA

Riverview Place
520 N. Delaware Avenue
Suite 301
Philadelphia, PA 19123

215.451.5053
215.451.5073 / fax

TENNESSEE

7891 Stage Hills Blvd
Suite 116
Bartlett, TN 38133

901.384.3645
901.385.9450 / fax

VIRGINIA

7611 Little River Turnpike
Suite 404 West
Annandale, VA 22003

703.914.2755
703.914.5437 / fax

Thomas F. Wilds, *President/CEO*

Mark A. Tannenbaum, *Director of Marketing*

Meredith Ritchie, *Managing Editor*

**St. John's Community Services**

2201 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Suite C-150
Washington, DC 20007

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage Paid
Washington, DC
Permit No. 3151

Address Service Requested