

# NEW BEGINNINGS IN COMMUNITY LIVING

Newsletter of the Community Living Education Project  
A part of the Rutgers School of Public Health



*"Educating families and staff about the possibilities in community living!"*



## **Spotlight Story: Celebrate Disabilities Awareness Day!**

*By Antoinette S. Johnson*

It's a Celebration! The Fifth Annual Disabilities Awareness Day took place on April 7, 2013, and once again participants networked, danced, and ate delicious foods! The program started with a welcome by Robin Turner, program chairwoman, followed by prayer by Deacon Helmut Wittreich, the pledge of allegiance by a local Girl Scout troop, and the Star Spangled Banner, which was sung by Lydia Cicio. A special musical selection was done by Janet Sorber and Kathy Hopkins. Mayor Francis Womack, Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, Assemblyman Joseph Cryan, Councilwoman Shanti Narra, Councilman Bob Davis and other representatives of North Brunswick participated in the ceremony. The most pivotal



Participants at Disabilities Awareness Day

moment of this special day was the presentation made to Diane Gruskowski who is the mother of Danielle Gruskowski, for whom "Danielle's Law" was named. Danielle's Law was created to make sure that direct support professionals dial 911 immediately in the event of a medical emergency. To commemorate Danielle's Law, *Danielle's Garden* was created at the Carteret Waterfront Park in Carteret, NJ. It is a sensory garden containing wind chimes, water fountains, etc. where people go to partake in the tranquility and the serenity it offers. October 26, 2013 will be the 10-year anniversary of Danielle's Law. Danielle was a remarkable and inspiring young woman who departed this life too soon. However, her presence will continue to be felt, and she will never be forgotten.

## *CLEP Wrap-Up Meeting: A Day of Collaborating and Sharing*

*By Ann Martinelli*

On January 11, 2013, CLEP held its Wrap-Up meeting for the 2012 year. Dr. David Wright, project director welcomed the participants including the CLEP Team, self-advocates, Division of Developmental Disabilities Olmstead Unit and representatives from 31 provider agencies.



Natalie Trump, training and consultation specialist, introduced the CLEP Team and asked the attendees to introduce themselves. Myriam Casseus, training and consultation specialist, shared information regarding CLEP's trainings and meetings held during 2012. This included our Pictures of Community Living Events (POCLEs) which are held at all seven developmental centers for both staff and families and meetings CLEP attends with partner agencies. Antoinette Johnson, communications manager, talked about CLEP's publications and other media including our bi-annual newsletter, monthly mini-updates e-Newsletter, annual magazine, website, Facebook page and our DVD on community living. Ann Martinelli and Sheilah Garry, training specialists, and Natalie Trump shared CLEP's family outreach which includes speaking with family members, setting up and accompanying families on group home visits with our provider agency partners.

Our Wrap-Up activities then shifted to an open discussion about partnership with all our guests. All participate in our POCLÉ's, provider agencies host group home visits for families, invite the CLEP Team to their homes to meet and interview individuals who moved from developmental centers for *My Life Now* magazine articles (with permission from family and BGS guardians). Some comments and suggestions included having the agency that is participating in each POCLÉ bring their nurse, behaviorist, etc. to answer specific questions from DC staff and/or family members. One of the Division Olmstead Unit representatives shared that having family members on the CLEP team makes a difference. She stated that a "connection" is made when she tells a family member that they are able to speak with another family member. One provider suggested CLEP should share long term success stories; one has provided support to someone for over 30 years, another agency supports a woman who just celebrated her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday! Other suggestions included having a self-advocate participate in the group home visits with families and suggest to the family that they could invite a DC staff member to accompany them, too.

Dr. Susan Hammerman, CLEP's co-principal investigator, brought us all back together and shared her thoughts on another successful year; CLEP is a neutral party sharing information with families that they may

*Wrap-Up Continued on Next Page*

not otherwise receive. The Division thanked CLEP for its work with DC staff, families and provider agencies. Dr. Wright introduced Dr. Bernadette West, CLEP's newest team member and co-principal investigator. Certificates of appreciation were given to Myrta Rosa and Adelaide Daskum, self-advocates, and all provider agencies for the work they have done with CLEP. The conversations continued as we all looked forward to collaborating in 2013 and beyond!



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## Apartment, Townhome, and Condominium Living

By Ann Martinelli

Group homes are the first community settings that come to mind for most people when they start to think about moving their loved one from a developmental center. However, another option is a smaller setting such as an apartment, townhome or condominium. CLEP will soon be sharing its newest publication, *Apartment, Townhome, and Condominium Living*, with families. This guide, like our *Community Living: Explore the Possibilities* guide will provide individuals and families with information they can use to assist them in making the decision to move their loved one to a community setting.

There are a variety of reasons a person and their family would choose an apartment or other smaller setting. Most families request their loved one be supported in a community close to their home and many live in areas of New Jersey that are considered urban locations. There are less group homes available in cities, but there are many available apartments. Families may use public transportation in and around their home and have easier access when visiting within an urban setting. Another reason an apartment may be chosen is the needs of the person. Some support needs can include a person needing to live with no housemates; group homes cannot provide that arrangement yet an apartment, condominium or townhome setting can.

Many families cannot imagine their loved one living in an apartment yet the supports are the same as in a group home. Supports are built around the person or people living in the home. If a person needs one to one support 24 hours a day seven days a week, that will be provided by the agency. In addition, all provider agency staff working in an apartment, condominium or townhome are required to complete the same pre-service trainings that group home and developmental center staff complete, which includes an Overview of Developmental Disabilities, Preventing Abuse and Neglect, Medication Overview, CPR and First Aid and Danielle's Law. Provider agencies will also require additional trainings based on the needs of the people being supported such as trainings on adaptive equipment, i.e. Hoyer lifts, dietary needs and behavior needs.

People who choose to live in an apartment, condominium or townhome have the same access to employment, volunteering or day programs that those in group homes do. In addition, the direct support staff members are responsible for the cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking, etc. the same way group home staff members are in the larger setting. Medical appointments are made by staff and transportation is provided.

We all have choices within our communities on where to live and how to spend our days. People who are transitioning from developmental centers and their families and guardians have those same opportunities and are creating lives based on their choices. Please contact CLEP to request a copy of *Apartment, Condominium, and Townhome Living*.

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**Living in the Moment:****The Art of Transition****By Antoinette S. Johnson**

Transition is truly an art form. It has to be well-planned as well as methodical. When making a transition, you move through different stages of life and time. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines transition as “passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.” Also, another definition is “a movement, development, or evolution from one form, state, or style to another.” While life is made of many types of transitions, whether it is viewed as a positive or negative transition, our reaction to transition should remain calm and steadfast. Keep your attitude focused on the bottom line of the transition. The bottom line should be to make it through the transition as quickly, happily, and safely as possible. Stay positive by speaking to others who have experienced the same or a similar transition as you are currently going through. Another person’s perspective can help you tremendously when going through your transition. While each experience may be different, you may be able to glean from someone else’s experience the best way to transition.

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**If you are interested in visiting a provider agency or learning about other aspects of community living for your loved one, please contact CLEP**

**at 800-500-0448 or send an email to [clep@umdnj.edu](mailto:clep@umdnj.edu). We are here to serve you!**

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**As of July 1, 2013 the School of Public Health will become part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.**