Ebeye arrived at Easter Seals NJ this past Spring struggling to cope with the challenges of multiple disorders related to mental illness. Since then, she has made remarkable progress in her recovery. She has been taking her medication as prescribed, regularly attends her daily counseling sessions, and actively participates in the weekly classes taught at the residence through Easter Seals NJ’s ‘Be Well & Thrive Health and Wellness Program’. Ebeye has shared her inspirational experiences, strength and hope with her fellow residents, such as her struggles in looking in the mirror and seeing an overweight person looking back at her. The key to her present success, she says, is that she reflects back to where she was when she arrived and doesn’t want to be that person anymore.

“Eating healthy is the way to go,” Ebeye says. She is making healthy nutrition choices, drinking a lot of water, and exercising while listening to her favorite music at the local YMCA. She has lost an incredible 20 pounds since her arrival at Easter Seals and is very proud of herself, as well she should be!

She encourages her fellow residents to join the Y or a gym and not worry about what how others at the gym look. “It’s about inner beauty and feeling better about yourself,” she says.

Ebeye shares how much happier she is and how much her life has changed since coming to Easter Seals. She feels beautiful now and that joy encourages her fellow residents that with hard work and dedication, they too can lose weight and be healthy.

“I put the same hard work and dedication into becoming healthy that I put into my overall recovery,” says Ebeye. “Our health is worth it!”

Way to go Ebeye! Thank you for sharing your story and inspiring others! Continue to “Be Well and Thrive.”

-Dawn Graber, Site Manager
COMMUNITY LIVING | PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SHOW THEIR SUPPORT FOR OUR VETERANS

On November 11, 2014, Veterans Day - the National Day of Remembrance for our Veterans – participants at Sayreville CSS, wanted to something extra special.

For many weeks, our days were spent creating beautiful vases, pencil holders and candy dishes made from duct tape.

Staff and participants visited local VFWs, American Legions, and Veteran’s Memorial Services to distribute these little tokens of our appreciation for the services that our men and women do to protect our freedom.

Even though it was a great honor for us to distribute our gifts, the participants observed how grateful our heroes were when receiving them. And the best part of this is that they established a welcoming relationship with the Veterans and now have a cheerful place where they can visit with their new friends.

-Mari Bori, Senior Direct Support Professional

RECREATION | ANTHONY CAN’T GET ENOUGH OF CAMP MERRY HEART

Anthony attended Easter Seals NJ’s Camp Merry Heart for the first time this past summer and he couldn’t get enough of our summer residential program! He couldn’t stop commenting on how much he loved it, and how nice and helpful the staff was. He was even quick to let the newer campers know that they will soon be having the time of their lives. Since it’s a barrier-free environment, there’s nothing to stop anyone from living life to the fullest at Camp Merry Heart.

At the end of Anthony’s six day session, everyone was sad to see him leave, but to everyone’s surprise he returned to camp later that summer to volunteer as a counselor in training for three weeks. He assisted our program staff in creating new and exciting activities for campers of all ages and abilities. He also served as a role model and mentor to other individuals with special needs and disabilities.

With the participation of Anthony and other campers, we hope to launch a counselor-in-training program that would allow the campers to support one another by providing accessibility insight, program ideas, and facilitate self-growth.

-Todd Thompson, Director of Camping & Recreation

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT | JULIUS ON THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

Julius is a young man, age 25, who struggles with challenges presented to him by a learning disorder combined with a debilitating physical injury to his hip.

After graduating high school in 2007, he had a very difficult time finding employment and was lucky to be able to earn some extra money by mowing lawns whenever he could.

Understandably, Julius was very discouraged and frustrated when he was referred to Easter Seals NJ’s employment site in Millville in 2011. Since then, he has made great strides both personally and vocationally.

Over the past few years, he learned the process of shipping and receiving at the Easter Seals warehouse, how to operate the heat sealing machine, and how to palletize glass. Most recently, he has learned to operate a forklift and has passed the in-house certification and safety test required for operators.

“I think the biggest obstacle I had to work on was my own attitude,” admits Julius. “Easter Seals helped me to be a better person and have a better attitude. The staff has helped me learn different skills, how to communicate with others, and improve myself overall.” Today, he has become a role model who now helps guide and mentor his co-workers at the facility.

Julius’s goals now are to continue practicing his forklift skills and take the official OSHA forklift operator’s test, receive tutoring, and obtain his driver’s permit. In addition, he is looking forward to attending the soft-skills class available on site that consists of work readiness skills including proper and respectful interaction with supervisors and co-workers, appropriate dress for interviews and work, and proper behavior in the work place. Combined with his warehouse and forklift operator’s skills, this will allow him to look for employment in a field where he can become financially independent.

“I want to start fresh,” says Julius. “I want to get a good paying job, buy a car, and get my own place.”

-Shirley Battistini, Assistant Plant Manager
COMMUNITY LIVING | HEALTH & WELLNESS IN ESSEX COUNTY

At several of Easter Seals NJ’s group homes for people coping with the challenges of mental illness in Essex County, Site Manager, Dawn Graber, has been teaching weekly nutrition classes in conjunction with our Be Well! & Thrive Health & Wellness initiative.

The residents have been actively participating and encourage one another to eat healthy. During the week following each lesson, it’s evident that the education has been beneficial by the questions they ask, such as about reading food labels and pointing out the empty calories in soda.

Even if they “splurge”, the residents acknowledge it by saying, “tomorrow I’ll do better!”

Overall, they are drinking more water and less soda, and making healthier nutrition choices. After food shopping, they’re now measuring out their portions and exchanging healthy recipes. They’re paying attention to the nutritional information on food packaging and making sure to fill at least half of their plates with vegetables.

“It’s been so much fun teaching these classes, and everyone sharing health-conscious recipes, family traditions and learning what each other’s favorite foods are,” says Dawn.

The residents have all been honest about their former unhealthy eating habits and are now making a tremendous effort to be more health conscious. Easter Seals NJ is very proud of each and every participant and the determination being put forth. Keep up the great work everyone!

“This has been a rewarding experience for me thus far to be able to witness the camaraderie the residents have with one another and to see them express health concerns for each other,” says Dawn. “It’s priceless.”

-Dawn Graber, Site Manager

COMMUNITY LIVING | STACY EMBRACES HEALTH & WELLNESS

When Stacy first came to live at one of Easter Seals NJ’s residences for people struggling with the effects of mental illness in Essex County several months ago, she was very shy and introverted. She did not participate in many of the groups or activities taking place at the residence.

Since then, however, she has become quite an active participant in the weekly health education classes being taught at the residences as part of Easter Seals NJ’s ‘Be Well! & Thrive Health and Wellness program’. In fact, she took such interest in what she was learning that it inspired her to help one of her peers in the daytime counseling program she attends by writing an article on Diabetes education. It turns out that the program decided to publish her article in their newsletter!

In addition to fully embracing the health and wellness program and classes, she has become more and more active in the other groups and events offered at the residence. She enthusiastically shares her ideas and recipes with her fellow residents and even invited several to accompany her to her family Thanksgiving dinner.

Stacy is a great example of “paying it forward” as she really enjoys being there for her peers and sharing her newfound knowledge to educate others on important nutrition topics that she is learning. All of the ladies at the residence cook together and support one another in their endeavor to make healthier choices.

“The beautiful part of this story is that Stacy shared what she had learned to help another peer, wrote an article about it, and it was published,” says Dawn, site manager of the residence where Stacy lives. “She was so proud and couldn’t wait to show me the article.”

“I always enjoy the opportunity to have witnessed such a wonderful display of human compassion and someone making a difference in someone else’s life,” she adds.

All of us at Easter Seals NJ are very proud of Stacy’s accomplishments during her journey and can’t wait to be part of her continued growth!

-Dawn Graber, Site Manager

COMMUNITY LIVING | FAMILY DAY IN WARREN COUNTY

Recently, Easter Seals NJ’s residence for people living with the challenges of mental illness in Blairstown, Warren County, once again hosted a successful Family Day event. Over the past ten years “Family Day” has become a tradition “on the mountain”; a day to celebrate the love and support of family.

The festivities included a spiritual message by visitor Pastor Ninabeth of the Knowlton United Methodist Church who reminded us “to be grateful for the bounty that God has given to us”. The stunning autumn day allowed everyone to enjoy the outdoors over interesting conversation and the delicious seasonal banquet provided by the family members.

“We are grateful to the Easter Seals staff and to our families for attending our event,” says Joe, a resident. “We look forward to sharing our next family day with our friends and families.”

-Dee Alexander, Site Manager & Joe B., Resident
Recently, Easter Seals NJ’s adult day program for people with developmental disabilities in Rio Grande held an Open House for members of the community and family members to visit and learn more about our program participants and the services provided at the program.

The presentation to the guests began with introductions of the staff and program participants present that day by Nancy Danielson, service coordinator for the site. Direct Support Professional, Una Molnar, explained to the group about the community activities the program participants engage in on a regular basis, and how it benefits them. Easter Seals NJ staff members, James Richardson and Deborah Jackson provided materials and spoke about their roles in the ‘Be Well! & Thrive Health and Wellness Program’ to the attendees.

Patrick, one of the program participants, shared what he does at the program and how much enjoys coming daily. Maryann, parent of program participant, Joseph, shared with the group the difficulty she had finding a suitable program for her son and how grateful she is to Easter Seals for how much progress he’s made since he began attending.

The event was also attended by Senator Jeff Van Drew and Assemblyman Sgt. Bob Andrzejczak who greeted families and presented the site with a Joint Legislative Commendation Certificate of appreciation.

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**COMMUNITY LIVING | OPEN HOUSE VISITED BY SENATOR AND ASSEMBLYMAN**

I to r: Senator Dr. Jeff Van Drew and General Assemblyman Sgt. Bob Andrzejczak with program participants Natalie K, and Mary V.

The staff collaborated with community resources such as the Cape May Court House Library where Tammy, a certified fitness instructor, volunteers to teach a Low Fit Cardio Class. The Avalon Recreation Center also welcomes the group three times a week to its Sit & Be Fit class.

The program participants also enjoy getting their physical activity from outings such as bowling or utilizing recreational facilities like local basketball courts. Una and Janet have worked to identify other community venues for fitness such as walking trails throughout the county such as the Cape May Lighthouse Point trail. They supply their own fun fitness videos, and have even secured the use of gymnasiums at local recreation centers where the participants can enjoy country line dancing, arm chair yoga, and Richard Simmons’ “Sweatin’ to the Oldies” just to name a few.

“This initiative is a great example of the culture that Nancy (service coordinator at the Rio Grande program) and her team have created around the ‘Be Well! & Thrive Health and Wellness Program’, “ says Laura O’Reilly, AVP of Health and Wellness for Easter Seals NJ. “We strongly recommend that all fitness is done by certified professional instructors in a safe environment and we applaud the staff for finding appropriate resources.”

Easter Seals NJ’s exercise coordinator, Robin Nussbaumer, will soon be working with all sites to offer assistance in choosing fitness activities and guidance on certification of exercise instructors in the community, she added.

**COMMUNITY LIVING | GETTING OUR FITNESS ON!**

Turning the fitness trend into a lifestyle is the focus at Easter Seals NJ’s adult day program for people with developmental disabilities in Rio Grande.

Direct Support Professionals, Una Molnar and Janet Albert, along with program participants Susan L, Hannah G, Danielle R, Theresa P, Kristen T, Michael W, Christopher C and Gracie K are actively focusing on fitness fun as part of Easter Seals NJ’s ‘Be Well! & Thrive Health and Wellness Program’. In addition to encouraging a well-balanced diet, the staff members provide physical fitness activities for people of all levels of ability.

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**COMMUNITY LIVING | EXPLORING FALL NATURE**

On a beautiful October day, program participants at Easter Seals NJ’s adult day program for people with disabilities in Rio Grande headed out on a journey to explore Fall nature.

Direct Support Professional Miriam Smith and program participants Danny, Michael, Patrick, Hannah, Natalie, Gerarda, and Linda visited the Cape May County Park in Cape May Court House. When they arrived, their first sight was a flock of geese flying overhead. The group discussed how nature changes seasonally with the beautiful colors of the leaves changing as well as the way they fall to the ground from the trees.

After enjoying a picnic lunch, the group collected pine cones and took a nature walk including a bridge where were able to see the many fish swimming and jumping out of the water for a chance at the breadcrumbs being shared with them. The program participants especially enjoyed seeing and learning about the large orange colored Koi fish as staff research information on the iPad for discussion. Some facts that everyone enjoyed learning are that the Koi originate from Japan and represents love and friendship in their culture. They come in a variety of colors, not just orange, and have a lifespan of 200 + years which means that are often passed down through generations as a family heirloom! Owners who received their Koi Fish as a gift are believed to have good luck.

What a great way to spend a fall day – learning all about life and nature!
**COMMUNITY LIVING | RIO GRANDE SCARECROW WINS AGAIN IN PHYSICK ESTATE CONTEST**

Program participants at Easter Seals adult day program in Rio Grande are once again winners at the 6th Annual Scarecrow Contest at the Emlen Physick Estate in Cape May sponsored by the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts & Humanities (MAC).

The winning scarecrow, “Granny Crow”, was created by program participants Linda W, Daniel R, Patty C, Gerarda M and Bruce F along with the help of Direct Support Professionals Janet Albert, Crystal Clark, and Deborah Jackson.

Winners are chosen based on the number of ballot votes from visitors to the estate in each of five contest categories. Staff here at Easter Seals Rio CSS encouraged other groups to head over and vote for our scarecrow as well as families, group homes and friends. Every year our program participants enter this contest in hopes to win and we are proud to say they won again this year in the non-profit category making it the third time they were awarded a pizza party! 💖 - DSPs Janet Albert, Crystal Clark, & Deborah Jackson

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**COMMUNITY LIVING | SEASONAL FESTIVITIES & REcreation | RIO GRANDE**

Recently, a group of program participants at Rio Grande enjoyed a special outing to see the movie, Big Hero 6. Chris C, Danelle R, Susan L, Stephen B, Stewart W and Cecelia W were so excited to see the movie! Chris was quietly amazed by the movie while Stewart couldn’t stop talking about it. Everyone had a blast and no one wanted to leave when it was over! 💖 - DSPs Zymia Carter & Charles Burnette

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**COMMUNITY LIVING | SEASONAL FESTIVITIES & REcreation | MONMOUTH & HUNTERDON**

Residents in two of Easter Seals NJ’s group homes for people working on overcoming the challenges of mental illness in Monmouth County enjoyed Halloween celebrations that included a costume contest complete with prizes, games and activities. Halloween themed foods such as witch hat-shaped cookies and chocolate covered treats were enjoyed by all! Easter Seals NJ recognizes the benefit of festive recreational activities such as these for increasing the social skills and relational interaction of our program participants. 💖

In Hunterdon, residents and staff enjoyed a Halloween costume contest and party complete with pirates, Zombies, football players, and Indiana Jones (who won!), followed by activities including wrapping each other up as mummies and decorating pumpkins. 💖
Community Living | Belmar Staff Members Save a Participant’s Life!

Recently, a program participant at Easter Seals NJ’s adult day program for people with developmental disabilities in Belmar began choking while he was eating lunch.

Service Coordinator, Nicole McManus stepped right in and began to perform back blows until he coughed up a piece of food. He then began wheezing for a second time and direct support professional, Kim Bassyouni, stepped in and performed additional back blows until the remainder of food was freed. Nicole had placed a call to 911 and the EMT’s arrived and transported the participant to the hospital.

The new protocol for choking recommends calling 911, then giving the person several sharp blows to the back, right between the shoulder blades, with the heel of the hand. If this doesn’t clear the obstructed airway, “abdominal thrusts” should be tried next, alternating with repeated back blows, until the person breathes freely or loses consciousness.

Thanks to Nicole and Kim’s quick response and effective use of emergency medical training, the individual was medically cleared by the emergency room physician and able to return to the Belmar program the following day. What could have been a tragic outcome was prevented due to the joint efforts of these two Easter Seals Staff.

We are very grateful and proud of Nicole and Kim!

-LeeAnn DeMatteo, Director Community Support Services

Disabilities Awareness Day

Cape May County celebrated its 6th Annual Disabilities Awareness Day on Saturday, November 15, 2014 at the Avalon Elementary School.

The event offered information, food, music and fun for people with disabilities, as well as for all who are interested in the agencies and organizations that serve the citizens of Cape May County.

Approximately 250 people attended this year’s Annual Disability Awareness Day. Staff members Dawn Kauffman and Shannon Conn represented Easter Seals NJ and provided information to the community members.

-LeeAnn DeMatteo, Director Community Support Services

Community Living | Staff Member Honored for Receiving 2014 NJACP Leadership Award

Easter Seals NJ is proud to congratulate Direct Support Professional (DSP), Judi Ranno, on being the recipient of this year’s NJACP Leadership award.

The New Jersey Association of Community Providers (NJACP) represents a diverse community of providers dedicated to elevating community-based services that enrich lives and build futures for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Each year, the NJACP presents leadership awards in recognition of outstanding employee contributions in support of people with such disabilities across the state.

Judi was nominated because of her strong leadership skills and commitment to making a difference in the lives of the nearly 75 program participants she supports daily in her position as a DSP/Nurse at our adult day program for people with developmental disabilities in Lakewood.

When officials in the township of Brick where Judi resides learned of her achievement, she was invited to be recognized at the township’s council meeting where she was presented with a proclamation declaring December 9th, 2014 as “Judi Ranno Day”.

“She is a role model who has earned everyone’s respect and admiration for her professionalism and for always going the extra mile to provide the very best services possible. Her kind, supportive and calming nature does not go unnoticed by the individuals she works with, their caregivers, and her fellow staff member,” says Brian Fitzgerald, President and CEO of Easter Seals NJ. “All of Judi’s actions demonstrate love and kindness and she possesses an amazing ability to connect with people and make them feel special and valued. Above all, she strives to ensure that every day is a special one for each individual she supports.”

At Easter Seals New Jersey, we value people for who they are, what they offer, and what they hope to achieve. Judi is steadfast in demonstrating that value to our program participants, her fellow staff members, and anyone who has the pleasure of interacting with her.

Again, we congratulate her on this well-deserved recognition and thank her sincerely for exemplifying our mission to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities.

-Dawn Kauffman, SDSP & Shannon Conn, DSP
**DEAR EASTER SEALS... | ST. JOSEPH’S HOSPITAL**

Dear Ms. Laura O’Reilly:

I would like to take the opportunity to formally THANK YOU and your Wellness Team at Easter Seals New Jersey for the unprecedented commitment, positive energy, and “know how” you have provided on behalf of St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital and the communities we serve including our children, adolescents, and young adults with disabilities and special needs and their families.

Our synergistic partnership has been well received and congruent with the needs of the communities we both serve. We look forward to continue working closely together in the New Year.

-Jaime L. Pula, PhD, RD, Wellness Coordinator, Pediatrics Researcher

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**DEAR EASTER SEALS... RIO GRANDE**

Dear Easter Seals staff (Rio Grande CSS),

We were so happy to see all of our guys and gals enjoying the Halloween party you provided for them. It was a lot of extra work and planning but the joy you gave them was uncountable. We thank you all!

-Sandy & Bob (parents of Bruce)

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**DEAR EASTER SEALS... RIO GRANDE**

Dear Easter Seals staff (Rio Grande CSS),

We really want you to know how much we appreciate all that you do to help our daughter, Hannah. The tender care you take and kind words are all noticed with lots of gratitude. Thank you all for giving so much of yourselves to helping others.

-Jaymie & John (parents of Hannah)

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**DEAR EASTER SEALS RIO GRANDE... DONATION ENCLOSED!**

Dear Easter Seals NJ Rio Grande:

The Royal Oaks Club is social club located at the Sand Barrens Golf Club in Swainton, NJ. Our members are familiar with the good work that your organization does for many people in Cape May County.

On behalf of all of the members of the Royal Oaks Club, we would like to offer the enclosed donation of $1,000.

Sincerely,

The Officers, Trustees and Members of the Royal Oaks Club, Inc.
Dear Easter Seals staff (Essex BHS),

You are truly an amazing organization. My cousin, Anthony H, is a resident of your group home for people living with the challenges of mental illness in Essex County. Since coming to Easter Seals, he has grown into a responsible, outgoing, and determined young man. Anthony always says how happy he is and how kind Dawn and the staff are to him.

You couldn’t have picked a better manager. Dawn is very kind, very personable, and very concerned about Anthony. She keeps me informed of upcoming events for Easter Seals clients. My mom and I have learned a lot of interesting techniques from Dawn during Anthony’s evaluation meetings.

Angela is so amazing; every time I call to speak to Anthony, she is warm, friendly, and very comforting. Anthony really took to Angela and I’m so glad she works at this residence. She is a major asset to this organization.

It’s always a pleasure speaking with Shana and Henry, the weekend staff. Our family gets together on Saturdays and when we pick Anthony up in the mornings, Shana always comes to the door with a smile and Henry comes out to the car to greet my family with a pleasant smile when we drop Anthony off.

Our family wishes to express our heartfelt appreciation for the kindness and excellent care Anthony receives at Easter Seals. While I was undergoing grueling chemotherapy treatments, the sensitivity and support of your fine staff helped me through a very difficult time and my family will never forget your kindness.

Sincerely,
Cynthia and Family

Remember, your stories matter!

Everyday many of you work hand in hand with individuals of varying developmental, mental, and physical disabilities in an effort to help them reach their goals or bring positive change or impact to their lives. This newsletter demonstrates that.

YOUR stories of our participants’ inspiring efforts or victories - whether large or small - and the impact Easter Seals and our staff have in bringing those achievements to fruition are not just important - they are critical to our mission.

Why? These stories are used in more ways than just the success story showcase newsletter. They start here, but then are used for other important purposes, such as grant applications, annual report, newsletters and press releases, requests for donor support, posting on our social media channels, and more.

So...have a story like the ones featured in this issue that you want to share? Share your stories of impact with us!

Here’s how: Simply log on to the employee intranet (http://intranet.eastersealsnj.org/) and look for this icon on the home page:

Share Your Success Stories
Click Here >>

Questions? Email Aly B. at abalan-altman@nj.easterseals.com

Next Success Story Showcase Issue: February 2015

Easter Seals In the News!

Did you know that Easter Seals NJ’s public website has a media/newsroom page under "Who We Are" with links to published articles that have appeared in various news media outlets? Check out it today at:

www.easterseals.com/nj/who-we-are/media-newsroom.html