



## A letter from our President and CEO



Dear Friends,

Undoubtedly, you've heard about it everywhere: worker shortages in healthcare. How did we get here? What is Richmond doing to help mitigate the problem and where do we stand today?

In 2020, the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) surveyed providers about the already existing shortage of staff who work with individuals with disabilities (direct support professionals or DSPs). These shortages arose due to low wages and competition with higher-paying entry-level jobs. Why the low pay?

Many providers, RCS included, rely primarily on Medicaid funding, and are limited to paying salaries that reimbursement rates allow.

Then, the pandemic hit. And with it, more DSPs left the field due to personal risk concerns, the lack of increased wages/hazard pay, higher unemployment benefits, declining vaccination, workplace culture, and caregiver responsibilities. At RCS, 37% of employees complete less than one year with the organization. With this sobering news, how do we move forward?

Governor Hochul recently announced that the new state budget includes \$10 billion in funding to restore and improve the healthcare industry. Some of the funds were allocated to provide one-time payments to DSPs who worked during the pandemic, with additional funds going to those that are COVID vaccinated. Additionally, monies will be provided for bonuses and continuing education. While these are well-earned bonuses, there is cause for concern that it may result in additional resignations.

Given the complexity of the issues, Su-Zann Tracey, Director of Human Resources, and her team have implemented a multi-point solution:

- Providing a welcoming and collaborative work environment
- Recognizing and rewarding outstanding employees
- Re-examining management styles
- Upgrading training processes and incorporating knowledgeable, seasoned employees in the process
- Improving RCS's social media and community presence
- Increased recruitment advertising

Currently, RCS offers a wealth of incentives to entice new DSPs including sign-on, referral, and retention bonuses, offering comprehensive and affordable benefits, and additional pay for working less common shifts and locations. With a variety of employment opportunities, RCS appeals to a wide range of workers.

The worker shortage is a complex problem that requires creative recruiting practices and advocacy for funding. We look forward to rolling out these new initiatives and welcoming new staff to our team.

With gratitude,

**Paca Lipovac**

## Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week

Richmond hosted a well-deserved celebration filled with fun events during DSP Recognition Week, September 12-18. DSPs, who are the heart and soul of organizations that offer services to the ID/DD community, support residents with employment skill development, basic life skills, keeping medical appointments and engaging with families.

Claudius Johnson, Director of Workforce Development, and other senior leadership staff, arranged for every DSP to be recognized; not an easy task due to COVID restrictions and guidelines! DSPs throughout the agency were treated to gift bags, lunches, cakes, treats from the ice cream truck and car washes. The week ended with raffles for cash prizes, electronics, and appliances.

This has been an incredibly challenging year for DSPs who have shown amazing innovation and dedication in safeguarding their residents. Being able to recognize the exceptional work of the staff is one way to attract and maintain a quality work force.



# Self-Advocacy

## What is Self-Advocacy?

RCS Self Advocacy is a group founded and led by people with developmental disabilities for people with developmental disabilities. We promote the awareness and recognition of civil rights and responsibilities, including the opportunities and choices of equal citizenship.

## Nothing About Us Without Us

The goal is to help self-advocates build the skill and courage needed to speak up for themselves and others. We believe that empowered self-advocates can help create inclusive communities and a person-centered and person-directed system of supports. We encourage self-advocates to speak for themselves individually and collectively.

## Self-Advocacy Adventures

The self-advocates had a jam-packed summer and fall. In addition to learning about their rights, they finished their first book from the book club and enjoyed some terrific events in the community. They attended a Hudson Valley Renegades baseball game on a beautiful night in May where they cheered the Renegades onto a decisive victory. In July, they took a much-anticipated vacation to Albany where they visited the New York State Museum, attended a Tri-City ValleyCats baseball game, and took part in their all-time favorite activity--karaoke.

Self-advocates assisted with RCS's annual golf outing in October and enjoyed being at The Old Westbury Country Club with all its amenities.

Rounding out their busy season, our self-advocates enjoyed a trip to New York City, where they were part of the audience of the Rachael Ray Show! They are huge fans of Rachael Ray, and even budding chefs themselves.



Cheering on the Tri-City ValleyCats Baseball team!



Visiting the New York State Museum



Time for Karaoke

## Fund Established in Memory of Kattamuri Sarma

The Sarma Family and Richmond Community Services proudly announced the establishment of the Kattamuri S. Sarma Memorial Fund. Named in honor of Kattamuri S. Sarma, Ph.D., the fund supports the well-being and enrichment of those with severe developmental and intellectual disabilities at Richmond.

Kattamuri's son, Shankar, has been a resident of Richmond Community Services for almost thirty years. A frequent visitor to RCS, he was often seen strolling Shankar through the grounds and gardens of RCS and nearby Untermyer Park.

Kattamuri emerged from humble beginnings in southern India to attain academic and professional success in the fields of mathematics, economics, statistics and data mining. In 2018, he was diagnosed with leukemia which prompted him to revisit his life-long passion, an in-depth study of the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit. After achieving a strong

remission in 2019, Kattamuri contracted COVID in late November 2020 and sadly passed away a few weeks later.

Kattamuri was an advocate for both the residents and staff at RCS and he and his family have supported numerous projects.



They have generously contributed to the weekend recreation program, safety improvements to the residents' bathrooms in Yonkers, and the creation of a large multi-purpose area where the residents could gather and engage in activities.

## Contributions & Donations

If you would like to contribute to the fund, donate online at:

[www.richmondcommsserv.org](http://www.richmondcommsserv.org)

or mail a donation to:

**Attn: Kattamuri S. Sarma  
Memorial Fund**  
Richmond Community Services  
272 N Bedford Road  
Mount Kisco, NY 10549

# Staff News

## \$500 Gift Card to Terri Lawton for Outstanding DSP

Richmond Community Services recognized all its Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) during the national DSP Recognition Week, September 12-18.

This year, DSP Terri Lawton was the recipient of a \$500 gift card. Several other DSPs also received gift cards for their outstanding work.

Terri has worked with the six developmentally and intellectually challenged men at Shrub Oak since 2014. Terri says she has “patience and understanding” and, like her co-workers, she takes great pride in her work. “I love my guys,” she says, and this is quite evident from the relationships she has developed not only with the Individuals in the home but also with their families.

When asked why many of the DSPs choose to work at Richmond, Andre Williams, Shrub Oak Residential Manager, lists great leadership as the number one reason. “Support from the top,” he says, “is essential and this is evident at Richmond. Flexible work hours, convenient shifts and strong union support all make a career at Richmond a number one choice.”

Congratulations and many thanks to Terri, and all the Richmond staff, for their hard work to benefit the residents.



## New Director of Human Resources

Su-Zann Tracey has been employed at Richmond Community Services as a Human Resources Professional for the past 14 years.

Previously, she worked in the healthcare field for a non-profit organization where approximately 70 percent of its workforce were service workers. She has experience in recruitment, engagement, recognition, employee relations, conflict resolution, legal compliance, benefits administration, performance management, union negotiations and data analysis. Su-Zann is keenly aware that the key to successful management is focusing on three main areas: risk, process, and people.

Su-Zann earned her MBA with a concentration of Human Resource Management from the Hagan School of Business in New Rochelle, her MS in Educational Psychology from SUNY Albany, and her undergraduate degree in Psychology from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

When Su-Zann is not working, she enjoys visiting museums and galleries, listening to live bands/ music and traveling to various countries while feasting on their unique foods.

## RCS Welcomes Its Newest Board Member, Stuart Goldman

Having been associated with Richmond Community Services for 39 years, Stu Goldman brings a wealth of business and fundraising experience to the organization.

Under Stu's guidance for over 20 years, the Golf Event has been tremendously successful in raising funds. His main efforts will be directed at increasing RCS's visibility to individual and corporate donors. We welcome Stu and look forward to his most valuable input.

## Richmond Community Services Board of Directors

Nick Spano, *Chairman*  
Dr. Eugene Buccini  
Pamela Dingee  
Pauline M. Galvin, Esq.  
Stuart Goldman  
Susan Goldman  
Akeem Jamal  
Alan Reid  
Warren Rosenberg  
Ravi Sarma  
The Honorable Robert A. Spolzino

## Foundation Board of Directors

Carol Baron  
Susan Goldman  
Ravi Sarma  
Steve Schottenfeld  
Terri Schottenfeld

# Events

Visit our website at  
[richmondcommserv.org](http://richmondcommserv.org)

**2021 Golf Event** raised over \$200,000 with over 130 donations. Six fantastic items were auctioned including Elton John tickets and an Italian Lakes vacation. The money raised goes to support the many programs offered by RCS.

## Save the date

**2022 Golf Outing will be on Monday, Aug 22.**



## Mission Statement

Richmond Community Services, in partnership with all members of the community, supports children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families, to achieve the highest quality of life through individualized services, life enhancing strategies, education, and advocacy, with particular expertise in meeting the needs of those with complex health issues.

## Join us for a Rooftop Reception

Thursday, May 12  
6:00pm-8:00pm

148 Lafayette Street P11, New York City

For information, contact Kim DiTomasso  
[kditto@dittoconsulting.com](mailto:kditto@dittoconsulting.com)  
or 917-991-8276

