

Independent Living for People with Disabilities

How agencies and families make it possible

JEVS Human Services, Philadelphia, PA

www.jevshumanservices.org

Westchester Jewish Community Services, White Plains, NY

www.wjcs.com

Welcome

Seth Diamond, CEO, Westchester Jewish Community Services
White Plains, NY

Cynthia Figueroa, President and CEO, JEVS Human Services
Philadelphia, PA

Introduction

- Our organizations thrive because they are connected to the most urgent issues facing our communities
- Intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, are usually discussed in the context of schooling
- There has been much work done in that area and, while not perfect, it is far better than it was
- But now, the next frontier is moving beyond schooling to appropriate independence -- our agencies can play a leadership role in this area with growing needs
- There is not an adequate government response—organizations like ours can help parents with nowhere else to turn



Families' Perspective

Lois Frischling

Marion Morgenthau



<http://www.jevshumanservices.org/>



www.wjcs.com

In the Beginning...2007

- Children with special needs, aging out of school
- Don't need supervision of group home
- Attended residential programs, so have some independent living skills
- No suitable options for independent living



- Group of like-minded families
- Identified key criteria for location and program structure
- Identified need for existing organization to manage community
- Selected agency partners--
 - WJCS (Westchester Jewish Community Services) and JCCA

Location Criteria

- Urban setting
 - Housing, transportation, recreation, vocational opportunities accessible
- Support, no on-site supervision
 - Participants live on their own in apartments in multiple buildings; no resident staff
 - 24/7 emergency phone number
 - Group activities to build community
- Admission based on capability, not diagnosis



Agency Partner Criteria

- Fit with vision/mission/values
- Interest in collaboration with families and other providers
- Track record of presence in community coupled with successful innovation
- Flexibility to deal with environmental and personal issues
- Ability to help navigate government programs/supports
- Financial stability
- Nice people!



POINT—2008

Pursuing Our INdependence Together, White Plains, NY

- 15 participants (14 male, 1 female)
 - Representing six states
 - All had lived away from home; and knew other group member(s)
- 1.5 full-time staff
 - Weekly check-ins with all participants
 - Activities
 - Emergency phone
 - Recruiting/admitting new members
- Meaningful family involvement with:
 - Agencies (WJCS/JCCA)
 - Other families
 - Community



2009-2011

From White Plains to Philadelphia

- Son, while thriving at POINT, missed family and sports teams
- POINT demonstrated proof of concept of the model
- No suitable options for independent living existed in region
- JEVS Human Services agreed to run the program



PIN 2011

Philadelphia Independence Network Narberth, PA

- 4 members, all male
 - All local: Philadelphia & near suburbs
 - 3 with experience living away from home; all knew each other from secondary School; 2 attended the same post-secondary program
- 1 full-time staff
 - Weekly check-ins with all participants
 - Activities
 - Emergency phone
 - Recruiting/admitting new members
- Meaningful family involvement with JEVS, other families, and community



2023

15 years of growth & progress

- In 2018, JEVS opens Independence Network in Collingswood, NJ
- Currently:
 - 114 participants in 3 states (NY, PA, NJ)
 - 17 full time staff, 16 part time staff
 - 69 men/45women living in 41 buildings
 - 10 states represented
- Governance of all communities includes families
- Participants part of fabric of broader community (volunteer, work)



Family/Agency Collaboration

Families

- Designed and initiated programs
- Family group with Steering Committee (main interaction with agencies)
- Families/members involved in programming, marketing & outreach
- Parents currently on both JEVS & WJCS Boards
- Responsible for finding housing and covering living expenses, and for managing government supports
- Fundraise
 - Personal donations / gifts from friends & relatives
 - Special events (e.g., golf outings / "Give for Good" at annual gala)
 - Help finding and applying for grants

Agencies

- Daily program operations
- Outreach and intake screening
- Hire and manage staff
- Manage additional resources for participants
- Lead activities, including domestic trips
- Identify service providers and partner agencies; guiding families to appropriate government funding

Today's joint presentation resulted from parents encouraging agencies to work together

Where do we go from here?

Planning for a long-term future

- Long term planning to support aging in place and changes in family involvement
- Continued growth (in current sites and beyond)
- More collaboration among agencies
- Tell our story



Staff Perspective

Barbara Greene, POINT Community Director

Jill Gromen, Director of Operations NJ and
Independence Network Services



Factors for Success

- Family support and engagement
- Location—vibrant and accessible neighborhoods
- Responsive and fluid support based on what the person needs and when they need it
- Relationship building that includes intentional work to build peer support and foster expansion of relationships
- Funding
 - Private pay increases opportunities for innovation
 - Dedicated fundraising committees with both organization and family participation
 - Braiding private and public funding



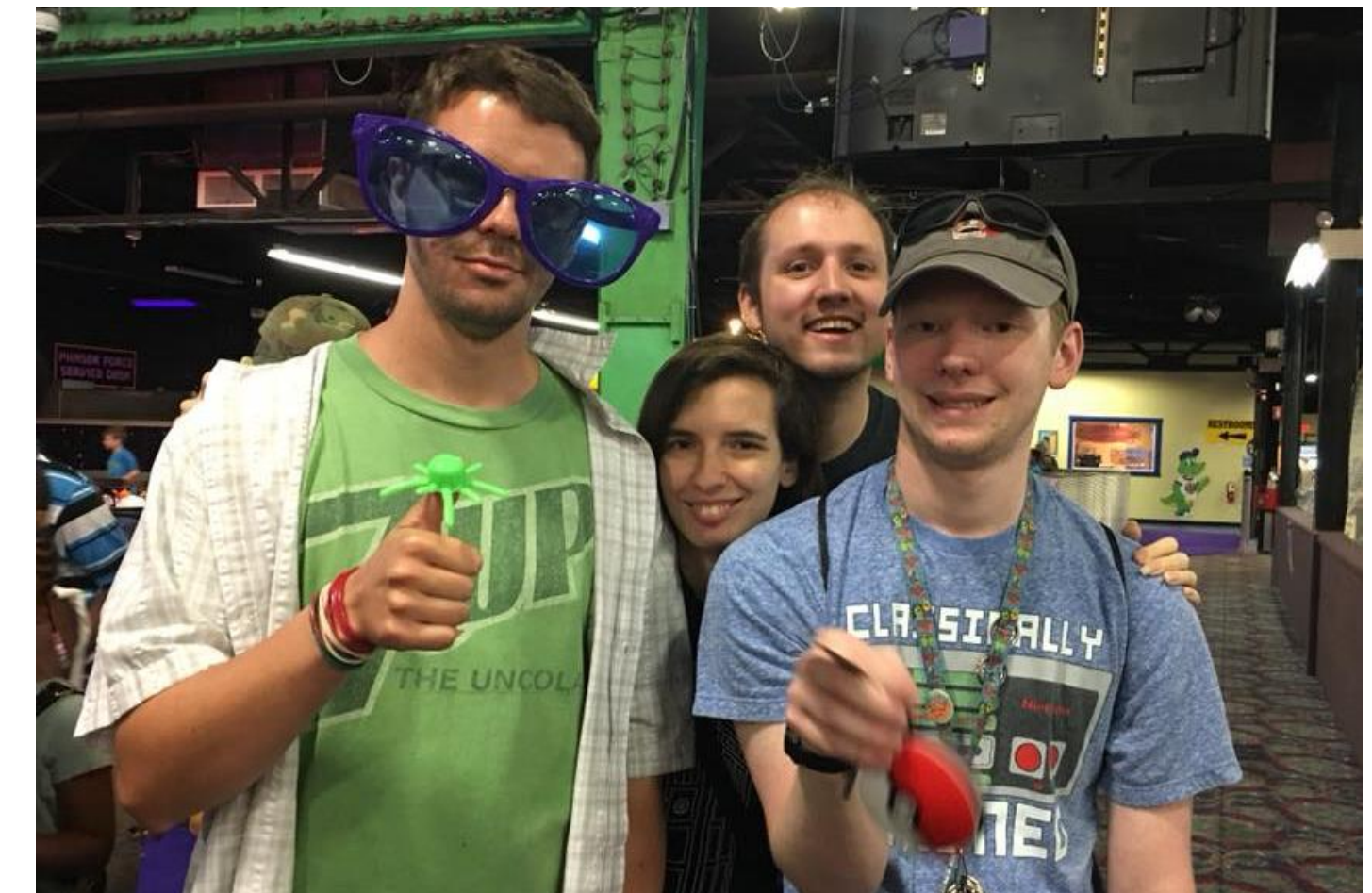
Factors for Success, continued

- Participants must self-select into community and have a true desire for independence
 - All agree up front to work, volunteer, or continue their education
- Participants are part of a broader community and have a sense of belonging
- Embedded employment support OR dedicated employment partnerships
- Stakeholders (families, participants, and community members) are active contributors to the evolution of the model
 - Participants interview prospective staff
 - Participation on dedicated committees or in focus groups



Challenges

- Transition concerns
 - Parent/child separation
 - Assimilating with the group
 - Adjusting to independence
 - New environments and change
- Founded as program for young adults who are now aging
- Families are aging, which can impact needs of participants
- Identifying and accessing gathering spaces that accommodate program growth
- How do we address growth?



Challenges, continued

- Funding
 - Private pay restricts program access for those who might need it most
 - Costs of housing/living expenses in addition to programming support
 - Budgetary concerns
- Recruitment and retention of staff (professional and paraprofessional)
- Retention of participants



Agency Perspective

Seth Diamond, CEO, WJCS

Cynthia Figueroa, President & CEO, JEVS

Making a Difference

Filling a Gap

- Getting involved will put you in the forefront of a crucial issue to your community
- But that is not the only benefit. Bringing new families into your agency's circle can help with leadership, fundraising, attending agency-wide events (e.g., annual gala)
- These families are ambassadors to others in the community
- You will be serving families who have no options to address the most important issue in their lives, both for members and caregivers



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Questions?