

I have a
dream.



EMPOWER

support services to help you live your best life

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

I have a dream.



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President, Board of Directors

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Empower is a catalyst for change. This was especially true in 2017, as staff helped people we support to make their dreams a reality.

Throughout 2017, Empower pursued a dream of its own. All year long, we prepared for an accreditation visit from the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). That visit finally occurred this past April, when we earned the prestigious CQL accreditation. Ultimately, this effort will result in better quality of life for people supported by Empower.

Finally, in pursuit of our strategic vision to be a collaborator of choice, Empower's senior leadership team networked extensively with community partners. That work led to partnerships such as Artpark's production of "The Odyssey," which will include 25 people Empower supports. Such experiences help the people we support to connect more fully with the broader community.

We all have dreams. This annual report details just a few. We hope you enjoy reading these stories of success.

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James Y's Story: We Dreamed To Communicate With and Support Our Son to Realize His Full Potential

James is a sweet, curious four-year-old who has attended Empower Children's Academy for the past two years. In that time, he has become more outgoing and confident in himself. He greets everyone he meets with a ready smile and many questions about his surroundings. He is well-behaved, waiting his turn to speak and following non-verbal directions from his teachers.

His parents, Pauline and James credit Empower Children's Academy for these positive changes in their son.

"They have helped James so much. Within these [Empower Children's Academy] walls, he is the boy we wish he would be on the outside. They've also taught us how to communicate with our son. Through testing, we learned that James has an auditory processing disorder. So, when he melts down, we talk slowly and use a firm tone which helps calm him and gets us reconnected faster."

Knowing exactly what her son needs is something Pauline learned from Margret Nawrocki, the physical therapist at Empower Children's Academy. Margret kept James' parents updated on his treatment so they could reinforce lessons at home. This consistency helped maximize James' progress.

Empower Children's Academy also introduced the use of pictures and life stories, which allow James to practice appropriate behaviors and what to do in specific scenarios. Part of the reason James

was reserved prior to attending Empower Children's Academy was the fact that he did not know what to do when he met other children, and became anxious as a result. Using pictures gives James a guide for gauging social cues and for controlling impulsive behaviors during those times. His parents now plan to buy similar picture cards to use at home so that they can help James continue on the right path.

Pauline and James are grateful to Empower Children's Academy for teaching them to be James' advocates in schooling and in life. Due to his sensory processing disorder diagnosis, James now has an Individualized Education Plan whereby his parents, Empower Children's Academy staff and Niagara-Wheatfield school district representatives meet to review his progress annually. Empower staff, including teacher Shaila Kokil, educated James and Pauline on the amount of input they can have on their son's kindergarten placement. Thanks to support from Empower Children's Academy, James' parents advocated for him to be placed in a special education classroom with a higher instructor-to-student ratio.

"Our dream is to continue to grow and learn alongside our son," said James (the father). "We hope the next stage of James' education is as collaborative and supportive as Empower Children's Academy was. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you."

James and his parents play at Empower Children's Academy

Empower's Children's Academy has a dream of providing the best preschool experience for all of its students. As the corridors ring with song and laughter and are brightened by children's inspired creations, it is obvious that this dream is being achieved daily. It is a simple yet complex formula of caring and qualified staff who get to know every child and their family; collaboration between staff and families on students' progress, and many program options to accommodate different learning abilities and schedules.

In 2017, a total of 99 students attended Empower's Children's Academy; 78 were preschoolers with a disability and 21 were private pay students who are typically-developing. There were six special education classes and six integrated classes, where typically-developing students and those with a disability learn alongside one another. From June 2016 to September 2017, Empower saw a 380% increase in private pay enrollment, leading to richer integration in the Children's Academy.

When June rolls around, and it comes time to say goodbye to students who are matriculating to kindergarten, the positive impact that the Empower Children's Academy has had on them is reflected in their composure, confidence and happiness. As this story attests, they are truly kindergarten ready.



COMMUNITY HEALTH

In 2017, Empower's Community Health division opened Empower for Elders, a social adult program for older adults. The program provides meaningful daytime activities and care for older adults who live at home with their families. While participants are in the program, their family members get respite from their

caregiving responsibilities. In the letter below, Maryann Zahradnik discusses the program's impact on her and her husband, who attends the program four days a week.

In addition to Empower for Elders, the Community Health division still operates

four other preventative health care clinics for people with and without intellectual disabilities: physical therapy, podiatry, wheelchair seating and mobility, and audiology. As shown in the story below, these programs can make dreams come true, such as living pain-free or regaining the ability to walk.

Lance K's Story: I Dreamed To Walk Again

Lance resides in one of Empower's homes and receives physical therapy through Empower's Community Health Clinic. Recently, Lance experienced a medical emergency that required him to be hospitalized and then transferred to a nursing home for rehabilitation.



Lance K. working with Physical Therapist Dr. William Serediuk, Jr.

With support from Empower staff, physical therapists at the rehab facility worked with Lance to help him regain his mobility. This collaborative effort was essential to his recovery. Every day of therapy took him one day closer to regaining his independence. Gradually, he reacquired his ability to walk.

When Lance returned home, he continued to receive physical therapy at the Empower Community Health clinic from Riester Physical Therapy, Empower's contracted physical therapy provider.

At the outset, Lance needed two staff to help him walk. Now, Lance is back to walking on his own, with staff providing assistance only when needed. This stunning recovery is due to Lance's hard work and determination, along with the support of Empower.

Maryann and Frank Zahradnik's Story: I Dreamed to Get My Life Back

A Letter to the Editor about Empower for Elders' Positive Impact on the Zahradnik Family's Lives

As a full-time caregiver of someone with Alzheimer's disease, I am writing to let others who are in similar circumstances know about Empower for Elders, which has given me back my life.

Five years ago, my husband, Frank was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Between then and now, Frank went from being my rock and partner to no longer recognizing or having any interaction with me or our family. Having been married 61 years, we have been through a lot, like most people, but nothing prepared me for the physical and emotional toll that his disease has taken.

Before Empower for Elders, I hired someone to come in and help a few hours a week, but, mostly, I cared for Frank myself, which has been challenging and stressful. It is not only caring for him but the added responsibilities of the day-to-day tasks of the upkeep of our home, paying the bills and scheduling appointments. Frank's care was a 24/7 commitment, leaving me no down time in which to recharge.

I was against placing him in any program because I thought I could do it myself, but it was becoming too much. On a friend's suggestion, I toured Empower for Elders, and decided to sign Frank up based on its non-institutional atmosphere and truly caring staff.

Frank and Mary Ann Zahradnik



I take Frank four days a week, and he seems to enjoy it. While he is there, I can relax, spend time with family and partially resume my real estate duties, something I dearly missed.

For better or worse does not have to mean that you are superseded by your loved one's care. There is help out there. I highly recommend Empower for Elders.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Zahradnik

JOB TRAINING AND DAY PROGRAMS

Mike N's Story: I Dreamed of Finding a New Way to Help

Michael began working at the Empower's sheltered workshop many years ago. Michael was eager to learn and quickly mastered new tasks. Always self-motivated, Michael looked for ways to encourage his peers and help them complete tasks. Michael also engaged others in activities when work was slow. As a result, Michael was well-liked by those around him.

When Empower's first bottle return center opened, Michael became a peer supervisor. His upbeat personality and gentle nature helped others to make the transition from the workshop to the redemption center. In this role, Michael found



From service recipient to employee: Mike N.

ways to make work fun with his wonderful sense of humor. He also showed an ability to resolve conflicts and solve problems.

Michael's natural leadership abilities came to the attention of his supervisors, including Director of Job Training and Day Programs Kim Kiely. Kim encouraged Michael to apply for a staff position as a health care aide. At first, Michael was reluctant, but with ongoing support from Kim and the Empower team, Michael agreed to apply.

In January 2018, Michael was offered the position and now works in this capacity at the Meadowbrook site. Because he had served as a peer supervisor, he already had strong relationships with the people he was supporting. So, his transition from service recipient to employee was celebrated by all.

Michael does whatever it takes to ensure the happiness and success of everyone around him. He is a shining example of what people can achieve with support from the Job Training and Day Programs division.

For decades, Empower has provided job training to people with disabilities in sheltered workshops on MacKenna Avenue and 30th Street in Niagara Falls. A few years ago, New York State directed providers to offer work programs in integrated settings. Empower agrees that the people we support should participate fully in the life of the community. To that end, in 2016 Empower became the first agency in the state to submit a workforce transformation plan.

In 2016, Empower opened its first integrated job training site, Empties for Empower. Empties is a bottle return center where people learn job skills and earn a wage while sorting cans and bottles dropped off by the public. Soon after, Empower moved its job placement staff to this location, enabling job counselors to get to know and observe Empties workers, who might be ready to move into competitive employment.

Empower staff spent much of 2017 getting ready to close its workshops and open a second bottle return center in Wheatfield, along with a new day program for people who enjoy community outings and volunteer activities.

All good things come to an end – and Empower's workshops completed their work in December 2017 – three years ahead of the state's deadline. This transformation showcases Empower's ability to change with the times and focus on what's best for the people we support.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

The Community Housing division supports 75 people who live in Empower homes, and provides in-home supports to another 41 people who live in the community.

For most people, home means comfort and the ability to be oneself. The Community Housing division goes out of its way to make sure this is the experience of the people it

supports. Caring workers provide individualized support to people. People who live in Empower homes add personal touches to make them feel at home. And Community Housing staff empower people to pursue their interests and dreams as the below story demonstrates. These life-enriching experiences give people a chance to build natural supports within their communities.

Sharon W.'s Story: I Dream of Travelling, Phoning My Friends and Celebrating Birthdays (Especially Mine)

Sharon W. has lived in an Empower home for over 20 years. She is a gregarious and honest person who doesn't mince words. You'll always know where you stand with Sharon! Her colorful manner of expression and playful demeanor endear her to fellow residents and staff alike.

At the same time, Sharon has difficulty transitioning from one environment to the next. She used to express frustration in a manner that disrupted those around her. Over the past year, Sharon made enormous progress on containing her feelings in these situations. Because of her social progress, Sharon received a Person of the Year award from Empower in 2017.

Sharon expressed the desire to call her friends more easily, so staff worked with her to create a phone book with pictures of her friends. The book helps Sharon to keep in touch with her natural supports.

Sharon loves birthday celebrations, especially her own. At her most recent birthday party attended by her friends and favorite staff members, Sharon enjoyed her cake and presents, which included a faux dog that barks.

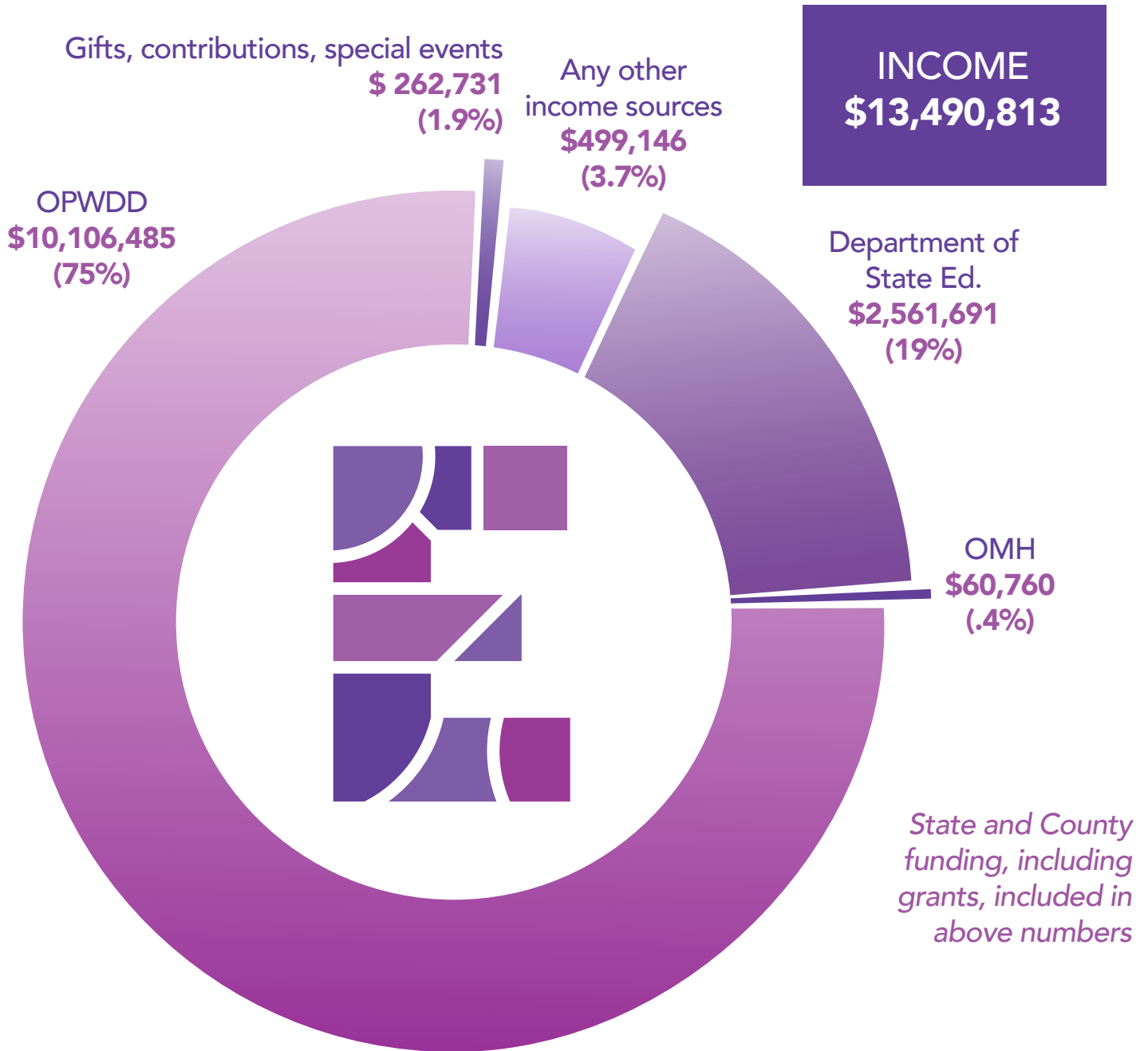
Sharon loves to travel, and refers to any occasion where she stays at a hotel as "camping." On a recent trip to the Finger Lakes, Sharon enjoyed a boat ride and dining out. When she is at home, Sharon explores different parts of the world via the internet or magazines. For her next trip, Sharon wants to visit the beach, and the Community Housing staff is helping her to plan this excursion.

Like every one of us, Sharon has many hopes and many interests. Empower is proud to help Sharon live her best life.



Sharon W., the life of the party.

2017 FINANCIAL REPORT



EXPENSES \$13,982,661*



* New York State continues to ask Empower and other providers to do more with less. In January 2018, through no fault of Empower's, New York State cut the agency's funding – both going into the future and reaching into the past. Due to this retroactive rate cut, Empower had to repay money to the state that had already been spent. This caused a deficit for 2017. Empower's leadership quickly put a fiscal plan into place to restore the agency's budget to balance in 2018. For more information, visit <http://buffalonews.com/2018/02/17/another-voice-dohs-missed-deadlines-put-nonprofits-at-risk/>.

2017 FACTS AND FIGURES

Empower expanded its footprint by opening Empower for Elders, a social adult day program for frail elders, based on Porter Road in the Town of Niagara.

Empower brought Kids' Music Round, an award-winning early childhood music program, to Niagara County for the first time.

Empower received a **\$52,000** grant from the Tower Foundation for Empower at Home, a pilot project to provide alternatives to certified housing placements.

Empower launched a yearlong effort to seek accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership.

Empower received a **\$25,000** grant from the KeyBank Foundation to help us open a scanning and shredding service later this year.

Empower was invited to provide job placement services as part of the HARP (Health and Recovery Plans) managed care program, and received a state grant to prepare us for the program.

Empower rededicated the Day Habilitation facility on Buffalo Avenue in Niagara Falls as the Joseph O. Mineo Day Center, in honor of our longtime CEO, Joe Mineo, who led the organization for more than 40 years.

Empower won a highly competitive **\$300,000** New York State grant to replace the roof and HVAC system at our administrative and preschool complex.

Empower Children's Academy went from **5 children** in our private-pay preschool program 15 months ago to a **FULL** program today – with a **waiting list**.

Empower now is tracking key performance metrics in every one of our programs.

Empower improved its external reputation by **6.6%** from **2016** to **2017**, and **98%** from **2015** to **2017**.

Working with allies across the state, Empower won support from state officials for BFair2DirectCare, which will result in higher wages for direct support professionals.

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SPECIAL EVENTS



2017 Basket Auction

Almost \$16,000 was raised for Empower programs and services at the 8th Annual Snowflake Basket Auction held at the Volare Lodge on March 24 and 25. Empower staff, Board members, people who are supported by Empower and their families and local businesses donated over 250 baskets, gift certificates, lottery tickets and cash to purchase these items. Attendees enjoyed trying for a chance to win favorite items and catching up with friends while eating delicious food, including Russ' famous Snowflake cookies and homemade fudge. It is a wonderful event that improves each year and as a result has developed quite the following. A huge thank you to everyone who contributed and attended. Auction proceeds were used to provide basic supplies for families in need and to send people to Camp Happiness over the summer.



25th Annual Matthew J. Murphy, Jr. Memorial Drive fore Empower Golf Tournament

It was another sunny day for Empower's golf tournament held at the Niagara Frontier Country Club on June 19. Golfers enjoyed the beautiful surroundings and good company while supporting a good cause. During dinner, longtime golf tournament co-chair and retired Empower Board member, Neil Gruppo, was surprised to receive a standing ovation from attendees including his entire family when it was announced that the Chairman's Award would be renamed the Neil and Mary Gruppo Service Award. This year's award was presented to Fran and Gary Hall for their generous support of Empower and numerous other community organizations. Masters of Ceremonies John Murphy and Keith Radford auctioned off several premium items, excursions, signed sports items and golf items. Raffle and basket auction winners also were called. In total, the event raised over \$20,000 for Empower's Job Training and Day Programs division. Thank you to everyone who participated!

SPECIAL EVENTS, *continued*

Living the Values Awards Luncheon

Empower held its second annual community awards luncheon at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Niagara Falls on October 27. Five awards were given to individuals, organizations and businesses that embody Empower's core values: dignity, excellence, leadership, accountability, and collaboration. Videos about each awardee were shown in advance of the award presentations and remarks. Empower is proud and grateful to

recognize these amazing awardees, and wishes to thank everyone who attended. We look forward to seeing you again in October for the third Annual Living the Values Awards Luncheon which will be returning to its original venue, Four Points by Sheraton on Friday, October 26, 2018.

2017 Living the Values Award Recipients

Empower Values Excellence:
2017 Inspiring Individual Award
Marshaun Walton

Empower Values Leadership:
Dr. Salvatore M. Passanese Leadership Award
John R. Drexelius, Esq.

Empower Values Accountability:
2017 Faithful Funder Award
KeyBank and KeyBank Foundation

Empower Values Collaboration:
2017 Priceless Partner Award
Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA

Empower Values Dignity:
2017 Exceptional Employer Award
Wegmans

Awardee videos can be viewed at: <http://empower-wny.org/calendar/living-the-values-awards-luncheon-2/>



2017 Living the Values Awardees, back row, left to right: KeyBank Foundation Senior Vice President/ Corporate Responsibility Catherine Braniecki, KeyBank Senior Vice President Alexandra Wehr, KeyBank WNY Regional Market President Buford Sears, John R. Drexelius, Empower CEO Jeff Paterson, Marshaun Walton. Front row, left to right: Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA Guest Services Manager Doreen Poole, Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, USA Operations Manager Jennifer Miller and C&W Account Manager Dan Gordon

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