

The FAMILY FORUM

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5

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County Urges enrollment in Medicaid Waiver Program: An Open Letter to all Recipients of Adult Day and Vocational Services

from **Kathy L. Sykes, Director, Mental Retardation Services**

I am writing to ask you to enroll in the Medicaid Waiver program.

Over the last two years, Mental Retardation Services (MRS), has enrolled 580 individuals currently receiving adult day and vocational services into the Person/Family Directed Support Waiver (P/FDSW). At this time, we would like to enroll the remaining individuals receiving services into the Waiver program. You and your family member will be contacted by a PATH support coordinator (case manager) who will assist in this process. The Person Family Directed Support Waiver has a ceiling of \$21,125 available for services based on the needs of each person. This amount includes the cost of day services.

The entire cost of your services are currently being funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Over the past 15 years, the mental retardation system in Pennsylvania has shifted from using 100% state dollars to fund services to using funding through the Medicaid Waiver, which is a combination of state, and federal dollars. When additional funds are made available to serve people on the waiting list, the funds are through a Medicaid waiver.

At present, there are a very limited amount of services funded solely by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The amount of state funded services has declined and we expect these funds to continue to decline and waiver enrollment to increase. In the future, if state funds are no longer available, the only alternative will be to discontinue services. It is for these reasons that we strongly advise you to enroll in the Medicaid

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Waiver program now. Enrolling in the waiver will assure funding of the services you or your family member currently receive and provide you with safeguards against a potential future loss of services.

In addition, waiver enrollment will benefit the whole mental retardation system by generating additional federal dollars with which to provide new services. There are several very good reasons for enrolling in the P/FDS Waiver:

- 1. You will have stable funding for your services.
- 2. You will have choice in selecting from among any qualified agency to provide those services in your plan.
- 3. You have the right to appeal any changes or decreases in your services.
- 4. You will receive support coordination services from a person with a smaller caseload.
- 5. Your services will be monitored at least four times every year to ensure that service needs are met including at least two face to face meetings per year.
- 6. People in the P/FDSW receive Medical Assistance coverage.

Enrolling in the waiver will assure funding of the services you or your family member currently receive and provide you with safeguards against a potential future loss of services.

Once again, I urge you to enroll now in the Medicaid Waiver program. If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact Mr. Eugene McCauley at 215-685-4742, or Ms Elaine Thilo at 215-685-5506.

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Summer School for Special Education Students: Philadelphia School District Style

by Beckie Dershaw, Parent

Two years ago I moved to Philadelphia from upstate New York. Prior to living in New York, my family and I lived in New Jersey. My family consists of my three children (two of whom have disabilities), many pets, and myself. Upon arrival, one of the first things that I did was to register my son for school. My son, who has moderate mental retardation and cerebral palsy, has been in school since the age of one. After Christmas vacation, I asked the teacher when summer school started. I was informed that there was no summer school.

This year I went to my son's school to complain about the school district's lack of responsibility to their special education students. I was then offered a summer placement for my son. I was told that the school district would only offer a summer school program to students who are assessed to show regression if they do not receive an education over the summer. When asked what tools they use to determine regression, I was told the teacher has the final say. The summer school program offered my son was three days a week, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The program is at another school and with another teacher and pupils.

Life in New York and New Jersey was very different from life in Philadelphia. From the time my sons were one, they were in school all year round with the exception of one week in June and two weeks in August. Special education teachers in these two states work summers with the same students they had during the remainder of the year. The only difference in programming for summer was that there were more activities outside, which was a wonderful way to incorporate physical and occupational therapies.

When I could no longer care for my oldest son, who is severely disabled, there was no problem getting him placed in a residential school. Help was only a phone call away.

So now I, like so many other parents, are faced with the problem of finding my son something for the summer. If I send him to summer school, will he really benefit for the short period of time he is there and especially having a new teacher who is not familiar with him or

his IEP? This also creates a problem: what do I do with him the two days he is not in school, or from 1 p.m. on? Do I have to quit my job or hire a babysitter? My son is 17, and I can assure you, he does *not* want to come home to a babysitter. I know I am not the only parent of a special education student who works. Do we have to give up our careers because our children are have disabilities?

Why does Philadelphia have such problems addressing the needs of people with disabilities? Other states do it so well, why can't we?

I found a solution to part of my problem. I was fortunate enough to get the help of my transition coordinator, Ben DiTullio. I have been involved in special education as a professional and a parent for over 26 years, and I must say, it is rare when you meet someone as caring and *creative* as Ben. When I approached Ben about my dilemma for the summer, he immediately came up with a plan that would not only benefit my son, but 29 other children with disabilities, as well. He applied for a grant through the Variety Club for a summer program for seven weeks, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., five days a week. I'm thrilled to report the grant was approved.

Last year Ben wrote for another grant through the Variety Club and it was approved. This time for an after-school program for kids with disabilities. Now, instead of these children coming home everyday to a babysitter, they can be just like every other kid in America: they can play with their peers after school. The grant gives transitioning students in the South Philadelphia area a place to go after school where they can work on academics, socialization, learn sports, increase self-esteem, and improve many skills that they will need in order to be productive citizens when they graduate. What a priceless gift! This program was designed to not only help children with disabilities, but it also recognized the needs of modern society. The fact is, most children are raised in single parent households and the parent the child resides with usually works. The Philadelphia School District still operates on the assumption that children grow up in two parent households and the mother doesn't work.

Well, perhaps at this point you are saying, "Well, the school district is doing something good for this population of students since they have transition coordinators." Unfortunately, they discharged all the school district transition coordinators last month! So now who is going to look after our children? The Variety Club seems to be more concerned about helping our children than the school district. While we are fortunate to have so many good special education

teachers, they are over worked and cannot be expected to perform the variety of tasks that a transition coordinator does. I'm afraid that parents will not get the services for their children that they need without strong, talented, and knowledgeable advocates.

Philadelphia wonders why the population is decreasing. In a city plagued with problems, couldn't they at least put the children first and offer them an educational system that is designed to meet their needs so that the city will be producing upstanding citizens and not just providing the minimum required under the law?

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Information for people receiving services and their family members on “Changing The MR System to Make Everyday Lives a Reality”

Summary

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Why are we changing?

The Office of Mental Retardation is committed to making “Everyday Lives” a reality for people receiving services and supports in Pennsylvania. Many forces have helped to shape the changes in the system, but mostly it is our commitment to the people we serve to support a more person and family driven system that brings us to where we are today.

We are building a system that promotes individuality, choice and control. We are building a system that will provide quality supports and provide information thru effective monitoring of the health and safety of people receiving supports and services.

The Office of Mental Retardation is obligated under state and federal statutes to establish a system that meets the needs of people; assures quality, health and safety; and manages state and federal funds responsibly.

What can you expect to happen after you are determined eligible to receive services? After you are determined eligible to receive services, you will be asked a series of questions referred to as a Situational Assessment. The Situational Assessment will help you in planning for future supports and services.

The Situational Assessment will lead to identifying your Individual Estimated Resources (IER). The IER is an estimate of the cost of services for people with similar circumstances.

The Individual estimated resource amount derived from this process is not a cap. In the event the IER does not meet your health and safety needs, you can request an exception case review. The IER is portable (funding will follow a person moving to another county and you cannot be unenrolled from the program due to relocation). Independent Mediation and Fair Hearing are also available if needed.

If a person's life situation changes significantly, he or she needs to inform the Supports Coordinator so that a new situational assessment may be completed which will result in a new IER to accommodate any change in need.

We expect a more fair and equitable distribution of resources across the Commonwealth by utilizing this planning process. This process will also help to plan and budget for people on the waiting list more accurately.

If the County has resources available, you will be enrolled. The IER will be provided to you and your supports coordinator to begin planning. If the County does not have resources available, the IER will help to plan for future budgeting.

Choosing your Supports Coordinator

A Supports coordinator (previously referred to as Case Manager) will be provided for everyone.

People and their families will have the ability to choose their Supports Coordinator or Supports Coordination Agency. Choice of Supports Coordinator or Supports Coordination Agency is contingent upon the availability of the person or the agency that you are choosing and their willingness to provide the support.

The Supports Coordinator will help you develop your Individual Support Plan (ISP) and personal budget. The

Supports Coordinator will provide you with assistance to locate and identify supports and services, coordinate and monitor the progress on the outcomes identified to make sure they are achieved.

Your Supports Coordinator will assist you in identifying the “outcomes” for your plan (what you want to accomplish with your plan), assure that your needs are assessed, and that your ISP meets both your needs, and desired outcomes. Your Supports Coordinator is responsible for assuring that services are delivered as planned.

Developing your Individual Support Plan

The Individual Support Plan is a planning process that is based on Person Centered Principles and will incorporate any person-centered tools/plans that you choose to use.

Prior to developing your Individual Support Plan (ISP) with your Supports Coordinator, you will want to think about what you want to accomplish with your plan, and the kinds of community activities and experiences that would enable you to achieve your desired outcomes. The ISP includes information on what is important to enable you to have an everyday life based on Person Centered Planning as well as medical needs, and health and safety needs.

You will be able to gather information about supports and services online through the Services and Supports Directory. This directory contains the names of qualified individuals or agencies who have chosen to be included, the types of services they provide and the counties where they provide services.

To develop your individual Support Plan, it may take one or several planning meetings or you may have already developed a good part of the plan on your own. Prior to the first meeting, the Supports Coordinator will orient you to the ISP and budget process as well as help to identify those other members you would like as part of your support team.

You can choose any individual or agency that is qualified by the State, willing to provide supports and services in your county, and able to meet your needs as identified in your Individual Support Plan. You cannot be denied your choice of qualified individuals and agencies that are willing to provide supports and services in your county.

In addition to traditional service providers, individuals may select people with whom they are familiar, (relatives, neighbors, friends) as long as they are qualified by the State to provide services. You along with your Supports Coordinator will gather costs of supports and services from the Services and Supports Directory. Your individual budget amount is the sum of the costs of supports and services. You will be able to keep track of your individual budget by reviewing a quarterly summary of expenditures of your budget.

Your Supports Coordinator will not decide how much funding you will receive, but will provide assistance to you in making decisions about your personal budget. Your person centered plan will be valued and followed.

What is “Quality” and how is it being monitored?

The goals of the Office of Mental Retardation are to protect health and safety, promote good outcomes for people so they live the life they want defined by the person and to provide value for the dollar and accountability in the use of public funds.

The Office of Mental Retardation and County MH/MR Programs, along with people and their families, monitor these goals through various activities such as licensing and Independent Monitoring for quality.

Quality is defined by you and incorporated into your individualized support plan. You may choose to use Person Centered tools/planning to help you accomplish this. All contracting and monitoring done by counties, agencies and people who provide supports will incorporate this concept.

How do I find out more information about changes in the

MR System? Information about the changes can be found by going to www.dpw.state.pa.us and clicking on the Office of Mental Retardation Web-site. Once you get to the OMR website, click on “Changing the MR System.”

Contact the Pa. Self-Determination Consumer/Family Group at 800-459-1838, or contact Mental Retardation Services and ask for County Transformation Manager Larry Pace, 215-686-0200. If you have concerns, please contact the Office Of Mental Retardation Hotline at 888-565-9435.

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Spotlight on Independent Monitoring Report

The Independent Monitoring Teams are teams staffed by people with disabilities, family members and interested citizens visit and conduct interviews throughout the state to gather information on people's level of satisfaction with services. With this new form of monitoring we learn more each year about the quality of care people are receiving. This report was distributed by Vision for Equality, Inc.

Highlights of the 1999-2000 Independent Monitoring Report

Source: Highlights by Statewide Steering Committee from report by Temple University, Institute on Disabilities Center for Excellence. Spring 2001

High Satisfaction. Most people receiving services in Pennsylvania are satisfied with major areas of their lives, Seventy-nine percent say they want to stay where they currently live, Eighty-five percent like their jobs, and 89% say they usually like what they do in their free time.

Quality of Physical Settings. We asked the Independent Monitoring teams to evaluate different aspects of people's, physical settings, including the safety of the neighborhood, the exterior and interior of the structure, the personalization of each resident's space, and the home's accessibility. The responses were overwhelmingly positive - team members gave most of the settings top marks.

Considerate Interactions. Most people say their staff and their roommates treat them well. Seventy-eight percent say their roommates are "nice" or very nice" to them, 90% say the staff at work is nice or very nice, and 91 % of the staff at home are nice or very nice.

Quality of Staffing. Members of the Independent Monitoring Teams formed many favorable impressions of the staff they observed. In general, teams perceived staffing to be adequate in terms of the number of people on site (92%), respectful of the people with whom they work (87% say "always" respectful), and supportive of control (87% say "always" supportive). Teams characterized 78% of staff as having "all" the skills necessary to support the individual in question.

Reliable Transportation. Whether they are getting to work, going to a medical or business appointment, or traveling for leisure, the vast majority of respondents rate their transportation either "reliable" or "extremely reliable." Only 3-6% characterize their transportation to any type of destination as less than reliable. Most people receiving services in the Commonwealth rely on transportation provided by the agency.

Respect for Privacy. Most people receiving services in Pennsylvania say they have privacy whenever they want it, or at least most of the time they want it (90%). In contrast, only 4% say they rarely or never have the privacy they desire. Most respondents say that other people respect their privacy by knocking on the door of their home (85%) or the door of their bedroom (80%) before entering.

Support of Friendships. A high percentage, 93%, of the individuals surveyed say they have friends and 84%, say that they have someone in their lives to whom they feel "extremely close." Although more could be done to create socializing opportunities with friends, the fact that 7.7% of the respondents say that staff "always" support them in making and keeping friends is a positive sign.

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Real School Funding Reform Could It Be Almost Here?

*By Mitchell Chanin
Jobs with Justice*

Pennsylvania has one of the most inequitable approaches to education funding in the country. The state government provides only about 35% of the money spent each year on public schools, leaving each district, no matter how rich or poor, to fund its schools through local property taxes. Many districts – like those in Philadelphia and in many rural areas – are desperately under-funded. In 2000-2001, spending ranged from a low of \$5,302 per student, to a high of \$14,406 per student. Only four other states have a greater disparity between rich and poor districts.

Over the past year, a grassroots movement of parents, students, teachers, and other people concerned about education has developed throughout Pennsylvania to demand an equitable statewide system of funding for public education. We believe that over the next several months, we have a real chance to bring desperately-needed resources to under-funded schools, and we need your help!

We think the legislature will begin a serious debate about reforming our education funding system this January. The state government's budget crisis has forced many school districts to cut back programs and to request increases in the local property taxes. The struggle over privatization of Philadelphia schools has brought even further attention to our state's inequitable funding policies and candidates for Governor have pledged school-funding reform.

This February, Rep. Nicholas Micozzi, a Republican from Upper Darby, introduced a bill to create a new funding system. Under the Successful Schools Budget Plan, the state would guarantee each district a level of funding that meets its minimal needs. The state government would calculate a "Successful Schools Budget" for each district, based on the average amount of money that the 33 districts with the highest test scores in the state spend on each student, and then supplemented to account for the additional cost of educating students with special needs, low-income students, and students learning English as a second language. Once a district has raised as much money as it can through a reasonable level of local taxes, the state would provide the rest of the funding needed. Districts that are currently under-funded would see their budgets increase by hundreds

or thousands of dollars per student each year. Philadelphia schools, for example, would receive more than \$500 million a year in new funding.

The state would raise the extra money by increasing the personal income tax, while requiring local governments to reduce their property taxes to 20 mills. Many low- and middle-income taxpayers would end up paying less or the same amount of taxes, and the largest share of the increased tax burden would fall on the wealthiest taxpayers.

Many organizations around Pennsylvania, including The Arc of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania PTA, AARP, and the League of Women of Voters, have come out in support of the bill, and many newspapers have run supportive editorials. The Pennsylvania School Reform Network has been lobbying actively for the Successful Schools Budget Plan, and many activists believe it has a real chance of passing in the next several months.

We are encouraging people around the state to learn about this issue; to call, write, and meet with their legislators; to circulate petitions; to come out to vigils, rallies, and other public actions; to solicit support from their home and school associations, unions, and other organizations. We think that if enough people around the state take action, when the legislature sits down to deal with issue of school funding next year, they will be forced to make the change that we are calling for.

If you'd like to get involved, please contact Good Schools PA and/or the Pennsylvania Schools Reform Network, two statewide coalitions that are leading the campaign.

Good Schools PA – www.goodschoolspa.org – is focusing on spreading the word, building support for its agenda, and pressuring legislators and candidates for governor. It does not endorse any particular bill, but is simply demanding that the state enact legislation that meets its demands. Good Schools PA has several organizers working throughout the state; if you want to join the chapter in Philadelphia, call Nellie Sepulveda, 215-332-2700.

PA School Reform Network – www.psrn.org – (Timothy Potts, 717-238-7171) can inform you of what's going on in the lobbying effort for the Successful Schools bill, and send you alerts that ask you to contact your legislators. The two groups can provide you with petitions, sample letters, signs, bumper stickers, and any other

materials you might need.

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How to Get "Durable Medical Equipment"

In a recent issue of the Pennsylvania Parents and Caregivers Resource Network newsletter, a question was asked about getting a power/motorized wheelchair from a private insurer. The following advice was given:

1. Obtain the master health insurance policy from your insurer.
2. Examine the insurance policy carefully to determine how medical necessity and durable medical equipment are defined.
3. Provide a copy of the insurance policy and the definitions of medical necessity and durable medical equipment to your treating doctor.
4. Obtain a narrative report from your treating doctor that indicates the motorized wheelchair is medically necessary, meets the definition of durable medical equipment, and the specific reasons why this type of equipment is needed in your case.
5. Submit this report to your insurance company and request payment for the motorized wheelchair. If you receive a denial, file an appeal. Your health insurance company will provide you a list of your appellate rights.
6. It is very important that you follow all of the time limits set forth in your health insurance policy regarding appeals. It is helpful to request that your appeal hearing be in person, although many of the appeals are done over the telephone.

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Why Does One Have to Waive the right to Live in the Community?

By Donna Szamatowicz, Parent

People talk about self-determination, but what choice is there for people with disabilities who are waiting for services and supports while a small percentage of the population continues to receive the bulk of the money to support them in segregated settings?

Consider that state institutions and private ICFs/MR have been allotted a COLA (cost of living increase) to operate in the new fiscal year beginning July 1, 2002, while community programs must do with what they already have.

Add to the fact that while the direct care worker initiative is a start, will those who work in the non-community setting automatically receive a salary increase?

The community system and those waiting for something, continue to advocate while nothing changes. People are still waiting, community programs need money; and institutions continue to receive funding increases while supporting a smaller number of people.

A recent report highlights this issue. Based on a report by R. Prouty and K.C. Lakin (2000) *Residential Services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends Through 2000*, Pennsylvania was supporting 2,407 people in several institutions at an average annual per person cost of \$115,705. In contrast, the average annual expenditures for the 10,134 people with disabilities who were supported by the Home and Community Based Services Waiver Program (HCBS) was \$52,498.

So, what can we do? We can send letters to the governor; talk to our state and congressional legislators, but regulatory/policy change must come from the federal government. We need a change in federal policy. Why does one have to waive the right to live in the community? If we think about the reverse, why not have to receive a waiver to live in an institution? *Community living* is the norm; not an institution. When the Social Security rules were enacted, institutions were the norm; community programs were still to be envisioned. How about the federal money flow to support community living instead of the institutions! The federal regulations/policies are outdated and con-



(Left to right) Jim Conroy, Jamie Ruppman, Donna Szamatowicz, M Brown, and Bill Coffelt begin the 21st NconSD Washington Initiative in the office of Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.

reflect an institutional bias. As long as that is the rule, community programs; services; support remain underfunded.

The National Council on Self-Determination (NConSD), affiliated with TASH, will continue work on influencing policy change that rejects outdated assumptions that keep community and supports from receiving the "first" dollar. Meanwhile . . . imagine no waiting lists!

Donna is a recent graduate of Project Leadership. In June, she joined with the government director of TASH; the Parent President for NConSD; and members of the Center for Outcomes Analysis to visit with legislative assistants of several senators in DC urging them to end the institutional bias in funding services and supports; discussing the unfairness nationally in the salaries paid to community support staff; and sharing with them the positive outcomes that occur for people who now live in the community. Donna noted that their receptions were received especially by Senator Kennedy's office who spent at least 45 minutes with the group. She also met with representatives from Senators Santorum and Spector's offices.

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Family Forum Odds and Ends

1. Riding the Bus with My Sister
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4. Movie Reviews
5. Did You Know?
6. Death Penalty
7. Prisoners

Riding the Bus with My Sister is a book about the author, Rachael Simon's, relationship with her sister, Beth, who has mental retardation. Beth spends her days riding the buses in the PA city where she lives, befriending drivers and passengers and being a very visible member of the everyday world. Rachel rode with her for a year, and the book is a chronicle of that time and how it changed their lives. Rachel also describes their entire history as sisters and covers many issues, including discrimination, self-determination, the concerns of siblings, and the role of friends. Rachel reports that Rosie O'Donnell has optioned movie rights! The book is published by Houghton Mifflin and is available at large bookstores. **See the calendar for local bookstore readings by Rachel on September 25 and October 24.** For more information, visit Rachel's website, www.rachelsimon.com Her email is rsimon@voicenet.com

Are We Being Heard?

On behalf of the National Governors Association, Governor Howard Dean testified before the Senate Special Committee on Aging on 6/20/02. He stated, "Nursing home care is an entitlement under the Medicaid Program while people who would prefer to be on the Home and Community Based Waiver program must wait, often for a long period of time, on waiting lists. There is something very wrong with this picture. This calls for a complete paradigm shift. We need to treat nursing homes and other institutional care as the last option, after all other options have been tried and failed. Experience has shown that we can serve many more people with the same funding, and serve them in the setting they prefer, when we are able to keep them at home and avoid institutional costs. Perhaps more importantly, we can provide a higher quality of life . . . Consumers are demanding more alternatives and rejecting institutional care. All we have to do is listen to them and follow their lead. If we do, we will have a better system of care and one, which provides for more people for the same dollars . . ."

Mailbag - Hello Family Forum

Wanted to share my son Gabriel's experience with you. Gabriel has been attending summer camp at the Carousel House for over seven years. It has been an enjoyable experience for him. The Carousel House is a Special Populations recreational and educational facility sponsored by the City of Philadelphia Recreation Department. The facility has three summer camp sessions beginning in July. They also have a summer sports camp.

For as long as I can remember Gabriel has had fond things to say about the camp. The participants go on trips at least twice a week to various places of interest, and they also provide transportation to and from the camp.

*I as a parent have grown to love the facility, not only for the services they provide, but for the caring, considerate staff they have. I feel comfortable in letting my child attend camp, knowing tht he will be cared for by such a wonderful staff they have on board. Check it out.
Tamar L. Riley*

Let's Get Reel

from Mark Bernstein's June News and Views

Well, summer 2002 is officially under way, which means the start of the blockbuster movie season when millions of Americans plunk down their hard earned dollars to sit in a darkened movie theater and watch someone else's vision of life, which, by the way, usually doesn't include sitting in a darkened movie theater. But to commemorate this wonderful season, we proudly present our first (and probably last) annual DITVAM (Disabilities in TV and Movies) awards or, as we like to call them, the Dittys.

Best portrayal of a person with obsessive-compulsive disorder: Jack Nicholson, As Good as it Gets (1997). Pure genius without once stepping on the cracks.

Best portrayal of a person with autism: Leonardo DiCaprio, What's Eating Gilbert Grape (1993). What? You were thinking Dustin Hoffman???

Most improbable story involving a person with a disability: Charly (1968) with Cliff Robertson taking a drug that turns him into a

genius. Alas, the drug wears off and he turns back into a pumpkin (oops, wrong story.)

Grittiest portrayal of a person with a cognitive disability: Billy Bob Thornton, Sling Blade (1996). Featuring John Ritter in the best performance of his career.

Worst title of a movie that includes people with disabilities: The Idiots (1998). A film from Denmark about a group of ordinary citizens who decide to become people with learning disabilities in reaction to the ills of society. Don't ask.

Most inspirational movie involving an individual with a disability who teams up with a fellow outcast to achieve personal glory and/or salvation and/or redemption: Tie between The Mighty (1997) with Jillian Anderson (sigh) and Simon Birch (1998) with Ashley Judd (double sigh). If I didn't see them side-by-side in Blockbuster, I'd swear they were the same movie.

First movie to portray a person with a disability: The Fake Beggar, (1898) a 50 second film by none other than Thomas Edison in which a man pretends to be blind in order to beg for money on the street. The jig is up when a policeman spots him bending over to pick up a coin. Policeman gives chase. End of movie.

Most embarrassing moment in a movie involving a person with a disability: When Giovanni Rabisi appears dressed as a giant dog in The Other Sister, (1999).

Most insulting and degrading performance of a person with a disability: Nathan Lane, The Boys Next Door, (1996). Looking like a deranged Jackie Gleason, Lane prances around promoting every negative stereotype about people with cognitive disabilities. Amazingly, he won an Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement for this disgusting performance.

Congratulations to all our winners.

From Mark Bernstein's News and Views, also comes a recommendation of a made-for-TV movie that debuted on the TNT network this July, and will probably be rebroadcast. It's called

"Door-to-Door" and stars William Macy as a salesman with cerebral palsy who fashions a successful career for himself despite some rather daunting obstacles. Mark says the movie is wonderfully understated in its handling of the subject matter and allows us to clearly see the man rather than the disability. Keep a lookout for it.

DID You Know?

Older Women's Support – The Supportive Older Women's Network (SOWN), a non-profit agency, based in the Greater Philadelphia area, helps women over the age of sixty cope with the complex issues associated with aging. As a leading provider of support group services for older women, it offers communities and social service providers extensive expertise in establishing and maintaining support groups. SOWN also offers consultation services, training programs and workshops tailored to address specific concerns of older women, their families and the professionals who serve them. Currently, SOWN is offering and developing Support Groups for Seniors, both men and women, over 60 who are raising children 18 and under. Current sites are Spring Garden Senior Center, 1221 Spring Garden Street, on Mondays at 10 a.m., and South Philadelphia Senior Center, 1430 E. Passyunk Avenue, on Wednesdays at 10:15 a.m. Groups will be developed in other parts of the city, as well as phone groups for seniors who find it difficult to leave their homes for meetings. Groups will provide support as well as sharing of information and resources. Contact Carolyn Schneider at SOWN, 215-477-6000, or email schneider@sown.org (www.sown.org) with questions and referrals.

Stories for Children – is a monthly television program on the School District of Philadelphia Network (SDPN). to introduce children in grades 1-6 to stories, storytellers, authors, poets, and illustrators. Telecast live on Channel 52 (8) once each month on Tuesday from 10:30 to 11 a.m., they are repeated on tape the same day at 5 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. and several other times during the month.

Braille Users – Classes at Liberty Resources are designed to teach consumers independent living skills using Braille. Receive individualized one-on-one instruction to learn how to label cans, bottles, cassettes and other everyday items in Braille, even create a Braille address/telephone book. Classes are held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., in twelve-week sessions. To register or for further information, please contact Cecilia

Ramnathsingh at 215-634-2000 ext. 240.

Utility Shut-Off Help – Customers who have not settled their outstanding bills with PGW can call 215-235-1777 to find out about payment plans and other options. Also the Philadelphia residents can apply for up to \$750 from the Utility Emergency Services Fund (USEF) for electric, gas, or water shut-off or shut-off status. Income eligibility has increased; for example a family of two can earn \$20,318; a family of four, \$30,888. The main phone number for UESF is 215-829-0545. Hours: 9am-5pm. They will answer any questions you may have, including questions about intake sites.

Accessible City Services – The City of Philadelphia's website lists accessible city services, such as the Airport, Art Museum, health centers, libraries, parking garages, police facilities, pools, recreation centers, and shelters. Go to www.phila.gov/aco/facilities.html

Fun on the Web – Two nifty websites for games: www.funbrain.com and www.factmonster.com

No Executions for Murderers with Mental Retardation

The Supreme Court recently declared that murderers with mental retardation can't be executed for their crimes because the death penalty would be "unconstitutionally cruel." Justice John Paul Stevens wrote, "Because of their disabilities in areas of reasoning, judgment, and control of their impulses, however, they do not act with the level of moral culpability that characterizes the most serious adult criminal conduct." Offenders with mental retardation would still be tried and punished when convicted of their crimes, however.

Vitamins?

In a rotten mood? Chew somebody out? Don't blame it on the Devil – maybe you forgot to take your multivitamin.

A report on a study of prisoners in the July issue of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* says that there were 35% fewer "antisocial antics – ranging from violent assaults to swearing at the guards" when the inmates were taking micronutrient supplements for a two-week period. Scientists aren't sure how such tiny doses of nutrients can make such a

difference in behavior. However, the report states that there is growing evidence that fatty acids, such as omega-3, can lighten depression and reduce irritability in adults. If someone you care for might benefit from this news, check with his or her doctor. A little fishing for fish oil might make a difference.

The End

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