Outlook

## People First News, October 2026

**From** Office for People With Developmental Disabilities <NYSOPWDD@public.govdelivery.com>
**Date** Mon 10/5/2026 1:39 PM
**To** Claudia Vidal <cvidal@esperanzacenter.com>

### People First News, October 2026

# Celebrating Value & Talent

## *October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month*




October is National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and under Governor Hochul's leadership, New York State is proud to be an Employment First State—a designation based on the expectation that all working-aged people with disabilities will have the opportunity to work in integrated settings and earn at least minimum wage.

OPWDD believes that everyone who wants to work should have the opportunity to.

This month we're emphasizing




that NDEAM is about more than raising awareness, it's a call to action.

Take a moment spread the word that inclusive employment makes workplaces stronger.

***Share*** our videos that capture this important message:

- **"It's Time to Employ Ability: Hiring People With Disabilities"** and
- **"Employing People with Developmental Disabilities: The Employer Perspective"**

***Encourage*** businesses in your local community to take the next step to support inclusive employment by signing our EmployAbility Pledge!

***Support*** those employers who have already joined the EmployAbility movement. See a list of the businesses and organizations who have taken the pledge and appear on the **EmployAbility Honor Roll.**

**Read Commissioner Baer's Full Message**

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**Save the Date October 14-15 for the 5th Annual Disability Rights and Employment Awareness Month (DREAM) Symposium.**

On **October 14,** there will be an in-person job fair and workshops on a range of topics

pertaining to employment. Visit the Office of the Chief Disability Officer for more information.

Register Now!

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# Artist Fellowship Available at OPWDD



Ready to make history?

Applications are open now for the New York State Council on the Arts State of the Arts Fellowship Program.

As part of this opportunity, OPWDD will welcome a creative visionary to our team for a year-long residency, where they will help tell the story of deinstitutionalization at the Willowbrook Center for Learning on Staten Island—located on the grounds of a former institution for people with developmental disabilities that shuttered more than 50 years ago.

The artist chosen will bring storytelling and inspiration to our project while advancing New York's commitment to community integration and inclusion for all.

Guidelines available at arts.ny.gov/SOAfellow.

**Deadline: October 21, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.**

**Fellows will be announced in early 2027.**

Apply Now

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# Accessing Life - Now in Print!



B.J. Stasio is a Peer Specialist 2 at OPWDD and a Self-Advocate who is one of the hosts of the Podcast Accessing Life. In future issues of People First News, you'll see a new column from B.J., also called Accessing Life. A note from B.J. below explains what he'll be covering.

**A NOTE FROM B.J:**

*Welcome to Accessing Life—a celebration of advocacy, success, and the power of our stories.*

*Every success begins with someone believing that change is possible.*

*In this space, we will share the voices and experiences of people who are speaking up, breaking down barriers, creating opportunities, and making a difference in their own lives and communities. These are more than stories. They are reminders that advocacy matters, our voices matter, and we all belong at the table.*

*I look forward to receiving your stories. Email your ideas to communications.office@opwdd.ny.gov and I'll be in touch.*

***B.J. Stasio***

Do YOU have story to tell about the success of your advocacy? We want to know.

Send a Story Idea to B.J.

# A Generous Donation is Recognized




OPWDD would like to give a shout out to Ryin. Recently, Ryin generously collected and donated can tabs to the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central NY.

Charities, like the Ronald McDonald House, take collected tabs, which are made of aluminum, to scrap metal recycling centers to raise money for their non-profit organization. Charities often collect tabs instead of whole cans because tabs are cleaner, take up less storage space and are lightweight making it easy for children and schools to participate in collection drives for their community service projects.

In recognition of Ryin's thoughtful contribution, he received a certificate of appreciation from the Ronald McDonald House. He completed this project independently while attending Broome Day Services (also known as Chester B. Lord).

Way to go Ryin!

# What's In YOUR Richer Life Bucket?




This year Fairgoers visiting the OPWDD booth at the Great New York State Fair had the chance to answer the question **What Fills YOUR Richer Life Bucket?**

Helping people live richer lives is our mission at OPWDD and we take it seriously. Helping people live richer lives requires listening to what they say they want for themselves.  Living a rich life means something different to everyone, and no one's "bucket list" looks the same. We got some great answers this year.

Thanks to everyone who visited and helped us share the message that while we all may be different, we all deserve to live our own definition of a rich life.

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# *Voting Is Everyone's Right*



Early voting begins in New York on October 24th and we want to make sure that every New Yorker with developmental disabilities has the support and resources they need to make their voice heard at the ballot box!

make their voice heard at the ballot box!

Make sure you know your rights and have a plan to vote. Visit our Know Your Rights page for more information. Also check out the SANYS My Plan to Vote worksheet. And, if you or someone you know with a developmental disability needs help to vote, talk with your Care Manager or support staff. They are ready to help you exercise your right to vote.

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## *Dates to Remember*

**The deadline for registering to vote is October 24, 2026.**
*Accessible voting equipment is available at all polling places.*

**Early voting in New York runs from October 24th – November 1st.**
**Election Day is November 3, 2026.**

## *Voting Resources*

- Voter Registration: New York State Board of Elections
- Make a Plan to Vote: Self-Advocacy Association of New York State
- Register to Vote, Find Early Voting Information, Absentee Ballot Information and Identify Your Polling Place at your County Board of Elections
- Learn about the Candidates: Votesmart.org
- Learn about your Election: Vote 411
- Get Voting Help from OPWDD: Contact OPWDD's National Voter Registration Act State Coordinator

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# Recognizing Direct Support Professionals

### *Direct Support Professional Recognition Week*





***Commissioner Baer with the OPWDD's 2026 Direct Support Professionals of the Year.***

September 13-19 was National Direct Support Professional Recognition Week and the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) commemorated the occasion by honoring its statewide Direct Support Workforce and inducting 26 state-employed direct care workers who were named “DSPs of the Year,” into its Direct Support Hall of Fame as well as a state-employed team.

But the recognition to Direct Support Professionals extends beyond those who work directly for OPWDD. Many more DSPs work for our dedicated provider partners and provide support to people who receive their services through a provider.

As Commissioner Baer said, "while DSP Recognition Week is important, it’s equally important for our direct support workforce to know that we appreciate them ***every single day*** of the year."

Thank you to **all** Direct Support Professionals. You are the reason people with developmental disabilities have the support they need to achieve the goals that matter to them.

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# See if You Qualify for a Discount on Your Energy Bill




Would you like a discount on your energy bill?

Governor Hochul is urging New Yorkers to take advantage of the State’s Energy Affordability Program (EAP).

Approximately 2.5 million more households are eligible to enroll




for monthly discounts – including many that are now eligible due to Governor Hochul's expansion of program eligibility.

Why not take a moment to see if you are eligible?

Visit ny.gov/eap today!

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# Upcoming Dates to Remember




- October Down Syndrome Awareness Month
- October National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- October 14-15, DREAM Symposium
- October 6, World Cerebral Palsy Day
- October 11-17, National Case Management Week
- October 15-17, SANYS Statewide Conference & 40th Anniversary Celebration
- October 20, 2026, Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council Meeting
- October 21, 2026, Autism Spectrum Disorder Advisory Board Meeting

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