

Life's WORC – Making A Difference

In the 1960's, the care of individuals with mental retardation was offered on an impersonal basis in large institutions. Often times, the care was ineffective. Occasionally, it was abusive. The most notorious case of abusive care was uncovered at the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island.

In a startling expose of the abuses at Willowbrook, journalist Geraldo Rivera brought the horrors of Willowbrook into the living rooms of a shocked New York audience. Night after night, families gathered around their televisions in silence as Geraldo revealed the atrocities. Dinners went uneaten as people watched, listened and cried. Eventually, the tears turned to anger and a ground swell of outrage grew.

As a result of the expose by Geraldo, Willowbrook was closed. From this demise arose a new spirit to provide effective, compassionate care of this special population.

At the forefront of this movement was Vicki Schneps, the mother of a young lady who resided at Willowbrook. Ms. Schneps, along with a number of friends and Geraldo, formed WORC in 1971. This new agency committed to the dignity and value of every individual, regardless of his or her physical condition. In 1977, the new group opened one of the first homes in New York State for people with mental retardation. The home is located in Douglaston, Queens, and his named in honor of Geraldo Rivera. Its first residents were all from Willowbrook.

From an institution to a home – it was a long, rocky journey. A journey made

possible by people who wanted to make a difference!

Today, many years since it was formed, WORC has become Life's WORC. The agency now provides comprehensive support for people with developmental disabilities, including autism and mental retardation. Some of the individuals are profoundly retarded and multiply handicapped. Life's WORC manages 33 homes and 11 community based services throughout Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Despite its growth and name change, Life's WORC remains committed to protecting the dignity and value of every individual regardless of his or her condition.

Since it was formed in 1971, Life's WORC has been almost solely dependent upon Medicaid funds to make a difference in the lives of some special people. But with each passing year, Medicaid is funding less while reducing its payment for costs it previously covered.

At present, Medicaid Funding provides \$360 per day for each person in a Life's WORC home, which is 50% less that state operated facilities receive. Medicaid also provides \$250/person per year for clothing. Medicaid Funding can provide for basic necessities but it is not intended to offer an enriched existence for it recipients.

And even at its current level, Medicaid funding has never been more vulnerable. Across the nation, from coast to coast, Medicaid funded programs are being cut. In fact, New York Sate is becoming unique in how it funds mandated services.

In order to prepare for the tide of change that is approaching our shores, Life's WORC is attempting to connect to new private donors, people who also want to make a difference in the lives of others.

To afford prospective donors this opportunity, Life's WORC recently initiated the Make A Difference Campaign. This campaign affords people an opportunity to connect their donation directly to a person in need. The donor will know what the money is for, how it is spent and when it is spent. The donor will also receive a personal acknowledgement from the recipient of the donation.

Since the campaign began, many people are already making a difference. With a donation of \$3,000, a donor makes it possible for Life's WORC to buy a specialized bed for someone who needs it. Medicaid funding only allows the purchase of a standard hospital bed.

With a donation of \$5,000, a donor can make it possible for Life's WORC to purchase a specialized wheelchair for someone who has trouble fitting into the medicaid funded standard wheelchair.

A \$5,000 donation also makes it possible for Life's WORC to purchase a Dynavox. This is a special image board that enables a non-verbal individual to express his thoughts. Medicaid does not provide funding for this item.

With a donation of \$1,500, a person can make it possible for Life's WORC to offer a

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stipend to support an individual in his or her pursuit of volunteer and employment opportunities.

\$500 makes it possible for Life's WORC to treat the individuals in one home to a ball game at Shea or Yankee Stadium.

At the high end of the need continuum, a \$10,000 donation makes it possible for Life's WORC to purchase an emergency generator of one its homes in case of a power outage. As many of the homes have medical equipment that is powered by electricity, the generator is a much needed item.

A \$35,000 donation makes it possible for 12 autistic children to participate in the Life's WORC Music & Art Therapy program.

As Medicaid funding becomes less reliable, the needs of Life's WORC are now presenting many opportunities for a donor to make a difference. Every dollar is needed and 100% of it will be put to the exact use as specified by the donor.

We hope that you too will commit to Make A Difference by contacting Life's WORC today at 516-741-9000, ext. 241.