

DPD “Tracing Our Roots”

The Diocese of Paterson began services to children with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities by establishing a new agency called the Department of Special Education of the Diocese of Paterson. Originally given the mission to support and create special religious education programs, Father John B. Wehrlen, (now Monsignor Wehrlen), a young parish priest in the early 1960's, enlisted the help of many volunteers, community groups and generous people and together, a myriad of services were born.

In a time when virtually no community support services existed, the Department innovated and developed religious education programs, a summer camp for children and adults and a nursery school program for children with special needs. Families expressed the need for recreational opportunities for their disabled children to Father Wehrlen, who was also concerned about the fact that these children were often excluded from summer camps and community activities.

Additionally, he wanted to provide a break for the families who were the primary caregivers for their children, who often were excluded from public schools. He responded by developing Camp Alexander. This was established, with the help of the Diocese of Paterson, on church owned CYO Camp property in West Milford. Several cabins, a large dining room/all-purpose hall and tent platforms were erected by volunteers. This was the first “one-to-one” program, (one volunteer for each camper), of its kind.

March 5, 1965 - Department established by Bishop James J. Navagh- Father John Wehrlen named Executive Director

May 3, 1965 - Office opens at 597 Valley Road, Clifton (corner of Valley Road and Van Houten Avenue- Old St. Philip the Apostle Church) – Coordination of Catechetics (religious education)

January 16, 1967 - Gruenert Nursery opens (named in memory of Paul Gruenert- deceased husband of Special Education professor Dr. Marietta Gruenert at Paterson State College (presently called William Paterson College)- Nursery for mentally handicapped children. Location- Originally 597 Valley Road then 14 Jackson street, Paterson.

Late 1960's - Main office moves to 14-16 Jackson Street. The Jackson Street buildings eventually housed the Navagh Center and the Department offices, and living quarters for some of the volunteers. The building at 389 Main Street became Murray House Group Home.

June 29, 1969 - Camp Alexander opens (named in memory of Rosalyn Alexander - a mentally handicapped girl from Paterson who attended the Gruenert Nursery). Location- West Milford (present day Catholic Youth Organization camp)- Main building opens (built with mostly volunteer help- primarily Newman Club of Paterson State and Hoffman La Roche Personnel) Summer and weekend camp for the mentally handicapped.

June 27, 1970 - Three more cabins opened at Camp Alexander, West Milford, New Jersey

February 1971 - First Annual Murray House Dinner Dance Held

September 19, 1971 - As the Department grew and became known, families asked for housing alternatives to institutionalization. This resulted in the development of Murray House. Murray House opens (389-391 Main Street Paterson) - named in memory of James J. Murray Jr. - a mentally handicapped boy from Paterson who died in 1969 (Renovated with volunteer help of Hoffman La Roche Personnel). Murray House is the oldest group home in New Jersey. The first 10 years run by volunteers. Murray House became the model residential program for adults with developmental disabilities and was described in the Congressional Record as such.

1972

The Department opened Navagh Center in Paterson, a vocational and employment center designed to meet the needs of adults with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. The clients, adults with developmental disabilities, came from both Murray House and from the community.

1973

The Diocese allowed the Department to take over the beautiful 100-acre farm in Oak Ridge to build a larger summer camp and relocate our old Camp Alexander from West Milford, which we had outgrown. The property was named "The Wiegand Farm," in memory of Peter Wiegand, one of the Camp Alexander children who died as a young teenager.

1976

The agency was incorporated as the "Department of Special Education of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson".

1977

Two more group homes were opened, Wayne Marathon House in Wayne and Finnegan House in Oak Ridge. These original homes were large, as was Murray House, designed for 9 or 10 residents. Also in 1977 we opened Gruenert Center at the Oak Ridge facility, a vocational and employment program similar in scope to the Navagh Center.

1978

Camp Alexander in West Milford was permanently closed so the buildings could be converted to year-round use. Gruenert Center continued to use this site as an employment and vocational center. Two new group homes were planned here, to try to meet the ever-increasing need for housing.

1980

Alexander House and Columbus House were opened in the former summer camp buildings to serve eight individuals each.

1982

Father Wehrlen resigned as Executive Director in 1982 to return to parish work, but remained on the Board of Trustees. Father Robert Vitillo, a priest who worked in Catholic Charities, was named to head the new Social Ministries Secretariat (now called the Secretariat for Catholic Charities).

1983

A new executive director was appointed from the DPD existing staff. Tom Barrett had previously been an agency volunteer, Camp Alexander staff member, group home counselor and director of Murray House. Many long-time staff people stayed in the agency and were instrumental in melding the old traditions of the “family like operation” with the demands of the new professional environment in the field of disabilities. The dedicated staff worked together to make the agency thrive.

1984

The agency began the long process of accreditation with the Council On Accreditation of Services with Families and Children (COA). Julie Tatti was appointed to Associate Executive Director after serving as the founding director of Wayne House since 1976 and counselor at Camp Alexander and various positions with the Department since 1972. In October 1984, Gruenert Center was relocated to rented space at Hope House in Dover.

1986

The agency name of the “Department of Special Education” was changed to the “Department for Persons with Disabilities, Diocese of Paterson”. Supervised Apartment in Paterson opened. The agency achieved full accreditation status with COA.

1987

Alexander House and Columbus House were completely renovated.

1989

The Kelleher Supervised Apartments program was established in rented garden apartment units in Wayne. Wehrlen House in West Milford, named in honor of our founder, Msgr. John B. Wehrlen was opened. Gruenert Center was relocated, only a mile away from the Hope House location to a commercial building in downtown Dover on Blackwell Street.

1991

“People Need Friends” Volunteer Program was founded.

1992

Murray House was relocated to Clifton.

1994

Basile Apartments relocates to Kings Arms Apartments in Wayne.

1996

Basile Apartments moves to new condominium apartments in the same neighborhood where the program had relocated in 1994.

1998

COA accreditation yielded a 100% perfect evaluation.

1999

Fitzpatrick House was opened in 1999, in Pompton Lakes. Five men from the community moved into this beautiful home, named in honor of Msgr. John E. Fitzpatrick.

2000

Wallace House group home in Sparta becomes our first program in Sussex County.

2001

Calabrese House located in Parsippany was opened in 2001. Five men and women from the community moved into this group home named in memory of Dominick A. Calabrese.

2002

Major renovations doubled the size of Columbus House and added live-in staff quarters.

2003

DPD receives re-accreditation from COA – the Council on Accreditation.

2004

DPD hold its fifth annual Bike Tour and Walkathon.

2005

Murray House holds its 35th annual dinner dance. “Senior Care Project” begins planning to look at the possibility of creating a senior care facility in Oak Ridge.

2006

Barnet House was opened on January 30, 2006. DPD is one of the first agencies in the country to complete its COA accreditation preliminary self study completely online and the DPD System, a client tracking database is licensed by eleven other state agencies.

2007

In December, Tom Barrett, longtime Executive Director of the DPD is offered the position of Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Diocese of Paterson by Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli, Bishop of Paterson. Julie Tatti, begins a new chapter for DPD as the newly appointed Executive Director of DPD.

2008

The Administration was reorganized. Scott Milliken and Joanna Miller were promoted to Assistant Executive Director positions. The residential programs were divided to report to each of them.

The Behavior Analyst supervise the day program, Gruenert Center.

DPD's Policies and Procedures for Sarbanes – Oxley for providing Financial and Accounting Disclosure Information are included in the “Best Practices” information on the National Leadership

Roundtable on Church Management Website.

DPD started a drug testing program for new hires in January and began random drug testing and drug/alcohol testing for cause for existing employees.

The Department of Human Services Office of Program Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) has developed a Risk Management System which uses data to evaluate agencies in four areas of risk: Incident Reporting and Management, Abuse and Neglect Investigations, Program Inspections (Licensing) and Financial Audits. They recently issued their first report for the period starting on January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2007. We had a perfect score.

Wallace House was renovated including the dining room, office relocation and medication area. Furniture was replaced in the living room and dining room.

Bathrooms at Wehrle House were renovated to make them more accessible.

Renovations were made to Finnegan House including new flooring in hallways, living room enlarged, medication room renovated, accessible bathroom added and new furnishings in living room, recreation room and dining room.

2009

Strategic Planning Process is begun. The Planning Committee identified multiple goals for each functional area of the organization after obtaining input from the Board, staff, residents and the agency's CQI Committee including representation from clients, the community, the Board of Trustees, family members, and DDD. The DPD Strategic Plan is approved by the Board of Trustees for January 2010 – 2015.

2010

The DPD 5 yr Strategic Plan is approved by the Board of Trustees January, 11, 2010.

Pool Roof Collapsed – Plans for new pool building.

2011

Julie A. Tatti retires as Executive Director of DPD after working for DPD for 40 years. Scott Milliken is hired as the new Executive Director of DPD by the Board of Trustees. February 5, 2011

DPD re-dedicated the pool and APR room to Julie A. Tatti and Thomas A. Barrett our former Executive Directors. Our pool building is now called the "Julie A. Tatti and Thomas A. Barrett Activity Center." The celebration was attended by friends and family and Monsignor Fitzpatrick blessed the building. June 12, 2011

DPD Launches a Buy a brick campaign to assist with the building of a memorial garden outside the new pool building.

Howard Mann Passes away - first DPD resident to pass peacefully at home with Hospice.

Murray House celebrates its 40th year anniversary

Calabrese House celebrates its 10th year anniversary.

DPD welcomes new board members Father Brian Sullivan, Bruce DeMolli, Michael Calabrese, Donald Okner, Okechi Ogbuokiri

2012

Sister Joan honored at the Murray House Dinner Dance

Diana Iuculano receives Frank X. Graves award from Linda Graves

Monsignor John Fitzpatrick retires from St. Thomas the apostle church in Oak Ridge - June 2012

Larry Magliochetti former board member passes away

New Maintenance Building named and blessed by Father Wehrle - Daniel McCoy's Maintenance and Storage Facility - "Danny's Place"

DPD Welcomes Peggy Cofrancesco as its newest board member

Diana Iuculano passes away September 1, 2012

2013

DPD signs 20 year lease to stay at the current location

Pat Newton honored as Person of the year at the Murray House Dinner Dance

Vincent Zufolo passes away March 11, 2013