The affiliate agencies of Upstate Caring Partners have celebrated another year of changing lives. Our collaboration has grown stronger with time and we have been privileged to support even more children, adults and their families in 2016 than ever before. Our growing family of agencies is comprised of experts in a comprehensive set of fields - teachers, therapists, psychologists, care managers, social workers, direct support professionals, nurses, doctors, occupational, speech and physical therapists and more. Whether it be equine therapy at The Root Farm, care management services through CNYHHN, preschool and daycare services at the Gavras Center, specialty social skills groups at the Kelberman Center or a personalized living environment at Upstate Cerebral Palsy, we have services that span New York State and beyond, the impact of which is difficult to even quantify. For it is not just about the person we support, it is ultimately about impacting the entire family.

Family is at the core of all that we do. From our first few families over sixty years ago who helped shape Upstate Cerebral Palsy and those that created the Gavras Center, to the family of today who can sit down together at the dinner table because their child is able to manage what were once very challenging behaviors, families are always our focus. Families are the strongest advocates for the people we support and the most dedicated supporters and cheerleaders, celebrating every first step, first horseback ride, first word or first real job. It is the families who are the bravest and most steadfast heroes of all, entrusting our family with the care of their most precious people each and every day.

So it is to the families that this 2016 annual report is dedicated. Thank you for being such strong advocates for our services and for tirelessly working to make life better for your children, sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Working together, we can make a profound difference in each other's lives, shaping the course of history and thousands of lives as we go.
"I strongly believe that God gave me a gift. I never let Cerebral Palsy stop me from doing anything. I am very independent and know that I am an inspiration to others."

Nothing stops Kelly...absolutely nothing. Her determination to live life independently and to the fullest is contagious. From working at a television studio, to running her own DJ service to spending time with family and friends, Kelly takes advantage of all that life has to offer. She has a passion for music which includes a love of VH1, American Idol and most of all the band Daughtry, which she has seen in concert 30 times.

This passion for music led her to start her own DJ Service called “Party Club” and she enjoys playing music at local events. Kelly attends video production and editing workshops at “Spot Light Studios” in Auburn where she can explore and develop her creativity. One of her biggest and proudest accomplishments...is living independently in her own apartment (with her cat Snowflake!).

While she might have been born with Cerebral Palsy, Kelly does not let that define her. She received services in the E. John Gavras Center Early Intervention Program when she was three-years-old, attended their preschool program and Day Habilitation. She credits the Gavras Center with providing her with supports to live independently and to pursue her dreams.

Throughout her life Kelly has also experienced setbacks. She had a very painful accident and was hospitalized. She has had a string of painful surgeries related to her CP, but each time she was down, Kelly eventually got back up again, and in her words, “I did not let it define me...I kicked CP in the butt.”

Kelly’s service coordinator is one of her biggest champions and helped Kelly fulfill her desire to live independently in her own apartment. They worked with the Gavras Center to identify potential independent living options for Kelly. After identifying an apartment, Kelly worked with the apartment complex owners on modifications to the space, such as adding grab bars and lowering shelves, to make it more accessible.

Now Kelly and Snowflake are happily living in their apartment. Kelly shops, cooks, cleans, cares for her cat and does almost everything on her own, in addition to having an active social life. “I absolutely love my apartment and the sense of independence that it gives me,” reflected Kelly. “My life hasn’t been easy. But it is all about having a positive attitude and never, ever letting anyone or anything stand in your way!”
“Tren works so hard...she is a fighter. I have no doubt that she will have a job...she will be successful. Her time at The Root Farm has been literally life changing for her. She is such a happy young woman now.”

Living in an orphanage in China, 9-year-old Tren was searching for her voice. Tren was rarely allowed to go outside and forced to feed, diaper and regularly take care of the younger children and babies at the orphanage. She was exposed to unthinkable neglect and abuse that no child should have to witness or endure.

Tren was illiterate and suffered from Dyspraxia, a disorder that made it difficult for her to walk or navigate stairs. She was given just enough to survive at the orphanage, including limited food and water, and pushed aside when it came to treating her motor, speech and cognitive issues. Tren needed someone to love and care for her. At the age of thirteen her dream came true when she was adopted by her mother, Darlene, and brought into a loving and caring family.

Tren was very quiet and reserved the first few years following her adoption. She lacked socialization skills and just went along complacently with day to day activities, never speaking up or developing her own opinions or thoughts. But that all changed a few years later when The Root Farm opened in Sauquoyt and started providing services to children and adults in the community.

Tren started therapeutic horseback riding and became more comfortable around animals. Through working with the staff at The Root Farm, riding greatly improved her motor skills as well as her gait and ability to go up and down stairs. Riding creates a special bond between the rider and horse and over time, Tren felt a strong connection. This connection is what helped her emerge from her shell as she began to socialize more regularly with peers and staff at The Root Farm.

With the support of her Medicaid Service Coordinator she also participates regularly in activities such as karate, bowling, and dances. Tren has made friends at The Root Farm and looks forward to riding and spending time at the farm each week. She now walks, runs and spends time with her siblings as well as her friends...huge accomplishments for someone who was never given that opportunity earlier in life.

Tren is more confident in herself and is developing and expressing her opinions more openly. She is now a happy girl who, thanks to her riding experience at The Root Farm, actively thinks about what she wants and is confident in her abilities to make it happen. “Tren has finally found her voice,” according to her mother, “and we are grateful to The Root Farm for helping her become the beautiful young woman she is today.”
"I know my son Nicky is meant to be here. I know you are all supposed to be here and part of my child’s life. There is no way to ever explain how grateful we are, for what you have done for Nicky and for us."

Sending their young son to live away from home at the age of seven was not how the Rotundo family pictured their lives. Sitting outside in the pouring rain, uncontrollably sobbing in the car after they had just moved Nicky into his new Tradewinds residence was all his mother, Amy, could do. But a word of hope from someone outside tapping on her window foreshadowed the happiness to come. “I promise you...it’s going to get better,” said Patti Carey, Vice President of School Age Services.

Before he was three-years-old, Nicky suffered from debilitating seizures and epilepsy. In addition, Nicky was nonverbal and demonstrated extremely destructive behaviors targeting himself and others. He often inflicted damage to his face and body. At the age of seven Nicky attacked his parents and two siblings, as well as his doctors and therapists each time he met with them. His multiple therapies, neurologist appointments and meetings with specialists and consultants across the state and nationwide proved hopeless – Nicky was so violent that he was turned away from many practitioners even before they had the opportunity to meet him in person.

Nicky’s parents needed help...and hope. Leaving the house with him, except for doctor’s appointments, was impossible. They installed shatterproof glass throughout their home so Nicky would stop breaking the windows. Amy left her job as a Special Education teacher to try to manage Nicky full time. They had no idea how to give him the care that he needed. As Amy put it, they were “a family in crisis.”

Driving away from Tradewinds that rainy day the Rotundos needed a miracle to help their family. Weeks prior they had met with Upstate Cerebral Palsy intake staff about a residential placement for Nicky. At that meeting, Nicky attacked the staff interviewing him. Despite his physical aggression, the team knew that they could help. The Rotundos made the painful decision to place their “baby,” residually when the opportunity became available.

Three weeks later the Rotundos returned to Nicky’s new home for a visit. According to Amy it was “unreal....Nicky was a different child.” He was smiling, giving hugs and his face was starting to heal. Staff was pulling him around in a wagon and pushing him in a swing outside whenever he needed to calm down. They learned his behavior cycles and figured out how to comfort him and make him feel safe.

Now, five years later, the Rotundo family is hopeful for the future. Nicky is twelve years-old, and while he still has many complex challenges in his life, he continues to thrive at Tradewinds. “They saved my son’s life,” recounted Amy. “I don’t know where he would be now...where we all would be now. I am eternally grateful to the Tradewinds staff for giving him a chance and for learning how to make him happy. We now know that Nicky will live a happy life. As we were told years ago, it did get better...much better, for our son and family.”
Through the Pieces of HeART program, artists visited the Wellin Museum at Hamilton College for hands-on workshops in a new, creative environment.

Community Health and Behavioral Services mental health services expanded with new clinics in Utica and Rome, providing critical support needed to understand and manage mental illness.

In preparation for the Central New York Health Home Network to begin coordinating health care services for children, 22 health care agencies were added to the large existing network, all designed to help keep children happy and healthy.

The Tradewinds Education Center Residential Program was designated as a New York State Center of Excellence, a leader in providing comprehensive residential and educational services for students with some of the most complex developmental disabilities.

Snacks at the Tracks, Upstate Cerebral Palsy’s first social enterprise venture, opened at the historic Union Station in Utica, supporting programs and services at the agency while offering snacks and lunch items for visitors to the station.

The Kelberman Center moved into a new building on Genesee Street in Utica and also opened a residence for four individuals in Sylvan Beach. The Walk for Autism continued to be its premier awareness event, raising over $140,000 for autism services in the community.
Preschool and Child Care services at the E. John Gavras Center expanded, named as a Central New York Regional Economic Development Council’s 2016 priority projects, helping to fill the gap in child care services in the area.

The Root Farm expanded services to include self-contained hydroponic greenhouses called Freight Farms and also became the regional distributor for Action Trackchair, all-terrain wheelchairs.

The Tradewinds Vocational School in Chadwicks was dedicated to Susan Constantino, President and CEO of Cerebral Palsy Associations of NYS, for being a longtime advocate for children and adults with differing abilities.

The Miracle Works Warehouse provides non-profits access to low-cost products and materials and gives people a place to develop meaningful work and life skills.
“From an early age we knew that something was different about our son Alexander. He was not doing things like typical babies his age. It seemed like he wasn’t making a connection with anyone, even us, his own parents. The Promise Program gave us our son back...we now see a light in him and we are so happy to see his smile.”

Sarah Darrow knew that Alexander had autism even before he was diagnosed at the age of two and a half. He exhibited all of the classic signs...he was not making eye contact, flapped his hands and did not acknowledge the existence of other people. He was in his own little world. The Darrow family was overwhelmed with safety concerns with their son as well. He was drawn to water and turned it on whenever he was near it, often causing floods in their home. He also fled the house running - something they feared he would do again and again.

Thankfully, Sarah knew where to turn for help. She had heard about the Kelberman Center’s reputation for excellence in autism services and in helping young children. So she placed Alexander on the waiting list early, even before he was formally diagnosed, and he was able to start receiving services shortly thereafter. When the Darrows received his formal diagnosis Sarah said that while they were not surprised, they still went through a “grieving process.” She continued that “we didn’t know what to expect, we didn’t know what the future would hold for Alexander. But we hoped that the Kelberman Center would make things easier.”

The Darrows were always very wary about going out in public with Alexander, his tantrums and “odd” behaviors, such as licking windows, often caused people to stare or pass judgment. But through the Promise Program, Alexander learned the skills that helped him to unlock his inner self...a self that his parents knew was there somewhere. Through the high staff to child ratio and the use of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) curriculum, his teachers helped him to express himself and to acknowledge other people.

Alexander’s teachers taught him to be more social, a huge change from the very withdrawn little boy he once was. He is now interacting more with his family and older sister, which is a direct result of the services and intervention he has received at the Kelberman Center. The family was also able to receive keypad door locks, safety gates and a safety bracelet for Alexander through the Sherriff’s department, all with the assistance of their Medicaid Service Coordinator. The Darrows slowly felt much safer and more comfortable in their daily lives.

Alexander is so excited when he sees his teachers each day at school and out in the community, running up to them and smiling. Now almost five-years-old, his time at the Promise Program has made such a huge difference in his life. It has also given his parents an opportunity to talk to other families to share their experiences and learn from each other. “We are extremely grateful to Kelberman Center staff for helping to unlock our son’s beautiful spirit.”
“I was a single mom with two young girls. I worked to support all of us and we had a good life. Then I became very sick. My cancer diagnosis crept up on us and consumed our lives. I was no longer able to care for my children, work or manage all of the appointments and treatment that became a regular part of my life. I was exhausted and didn’t know what to do. I desperately needed help.”

Doctors discovered masses in her neck during Kathleen’s routine yearly checkup. What followed was a frenzy of doctor appointments and eventually surgeries to remove multiple tumors on and around her thyroid. Kathleen was extremely sick with no energy, just enough to care for her two daughters. During this time period Kathleen unfortunately lost her job, another major blow to this family. Her severe level of pain as a result of her illness and the anxiety associated with not being able to care for her family led her into a deep depression.

Desperate for help, Kathleen took matters into her own hands, calling around to various community agencies for assistance. She was finally referred to CNYHHN and to a care manager to help her deal with her difficult situation. “I was so relieved when I was connected with my Care Manager, Steicy. She made sure I got through things,” said Kathleen, “She helped change my life.”

CNYHHN coordinates services, including doctors and social supports, to facilitate regular communication and collaboration between providers ensuring the person’s needs are met. Steicy was able to provide the help that Kathleen needed, connecting her to services that she never even knew existed. She helped her apply for disability so she could start receiving the necessary money to care for her children and herself. She helped her access affordable housing and resources such as HEAP to help with heating costs. A link was also made to Community Health and Behavioral Services of Upstate Cerebral Palsy so Kathleen could receive counseling to help her manage everything.

Kathleen is now in remission, yet still has good and bad days. Because of all of the help she received through CNYHHN, she has decided to give back to the community, volunteering on a regular basis at a local soup kitchen. She has also dedicated her life to helping other cancer patients and families through their journeys by volunteering at fundraising events sponsored by cancer organizations.

“My niche is helping people,” explains Kathleen. “I know what it is like to have cancer and the toll that it takes on your life and your family. I know what it is like to be down and out, struggling for answers and to make ends meet.” CNYHHN and Kathleen’s care manager were there to help her pick up the pieces when she was at a low point in her life, and they continue to be there today helping her to manage her illness, access community resources and services and to most importantly be the best parent that she can be to her two girls.
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