New Jersey is moving forward, as much of the rest of the nation has, in moving people from institutions into community living arrangements. Our state is closing two of its seven institutions, North Jersey and Woodbridge Developmental Centers. The North Jersey DC (NJDC) closed on July 1. Woodbridge DC (WDC) will close by January 1.

While many advocates celebrate the closures, we must acknowledge the emotional impact it has had on residents, their families and the staff who have cared for the people for many years. For many residents, the staff has been the only family they have known; for many elderly families it will be a tremendous hardship to travel to the developmental centers in the southern region of the state where their loved one has been transferred.

CLEP has been a support to the families of people who live in the developmental centers since its inception in the early 1990’s. We have provided information to parents, siblings and guardians as they begin to explore the possibilities of moving their loved one to the community. Some jump at the chance to move out of a developmental center, others are hesitant and others do not want to even consider it. CLEP has always respected each decision and will be there for families and guardians when they need us.

In addition to working with families and guardians, CLEP has also provided informational support to the residents of developmental centers slated for closure. In August of 2013, the Division asked CLEP to provide information and support to the residents of NJDC during the closure process. CLEP sought assistance from Community Access Unlimited (CAU) to plan a curriculum with self-advocates Adelaide Daskam and Myrta Rosa. Director of Membership Development, William Busch and Assistant
What is the Return Home New Jersey Initiative?
By Natalie Trump

What is the Return Home New Jersey (RHNJ) Initiative? It is an initiative created by the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to bring individuals with developmental disabilities who have received supports out of state back home to New Jersey to be supported. Currently, New Jersey has statewide community-based supports in place to serve the individuals who resided out of state.

Carrie Conger has recently taken over the reins as the director. Carrie and her team of RHNJ Coordinators have been working diligently with the RHNJ families to bring their loved ones back home to New Jersey and help them to be connected to an agency that will provide community-based supports for their loved ones.

The RHNJ Initiative will help bring families closer together nearby in the families local community, provide homes for the individuals, some of whom have lived in institutional settings for many years, and will increase New Jersey’s ability to receive federal matching funds by providing care in New Jersey, which in turn will increase DDD’s ability to serve more people.

The Community Living Education Project (CLEP) shares information with RHNJ families about community living and the supports and services that are available in NJ. CLEP makes available to families their publications - *My Life Now* magazine, *Community Living Explore the Possibilities* guide, *Apartment, Townhome, and Condominium Living* guide, *New Beginnings in Community Living* newsletter and a monthly e-Newsletter *CLEP Mini-Updates*. Our CLEP team members work one on one with families, listening, talking and sharing information about community living today.

CLEP recently began hosting educational and informational sessions called RHNJ Pictures of Community Living Events (POCLEs) throughout the state. The first RHNJ POCLE was held in the southern region on April 4, in the northern region on May 16, and June 6 in the central region of New Jersey. During and after the event, families had the opportunity to get their questions and concerns answered by a panel, which included providers, the RHNJ Director, RHNJ Coordinators, and CLEP Team Members. Both DDD and CLEP received feedback from families. Some families commented that the RHNJ POCLE was very beneficial, that they gained a lot of information, and many fears and anxieties were allayed. Families stated that they were happy to meet everyone involved.

The DDD has asked CLEP to host additional family POCLEs statewide, by region over the next few months.
Director of Information and Referral, Gene Tavera began planning a hands on presentation, which built upon each previous month’s activities and power point. Each resident acquires information differently; some activities were more visual, some were more auditory and all were presented tactiley. We called our presentations “SACLE’s”, or Self-Advocacy Community Living Events.

Adelaide and Myrta, along with Billy, Gene and Ann Martinelli went to NJDC each month to work with the residents. We had two months when there were less than ten attendees, but every other month had between 15 – 20 residents participating, along with their support staff. Many people attended multiple sessions and we had a few that attended every month. Adelaide and Myrta had valuable experience that they were able to share including the fears and concerns they had when they moved from a developmental center to their new homes. They were honest about their feelings and how they worked to overcome their initial uncertainties about moving.

The support staff at NJDC were supportive and actively engaged with the residents as they explored “sounds of the community”; this involved playing a sound one might not hear at NJDC, such as a bat hitting a ball during a baseball game. Other activities included role playing how to interact with restaurant staff when they did not talk to the person with disability and asked staff what the person would like to eat. We also used laminated photos that each person could choose what type of community to live in (city, rural, beach areas). NJDC staff assisted the residents in putting it together on the table; Billy used his iPhone to take a photo and each resident’s ideal community was then projected onto the large screen for all to see.

As we approached the end of our sessions, residents began talking about missing staff. One gentleman, who was scheduled to move in April, asked us if we thought he would like his new home. Another talked about staff who had already left. These honest and sensitive issues shifted our last few presentations to talk about how to keep in touch with people we care about and how to address the feelings that were beginning to appear. Adelaide and Myrta told the residents how they talked things out with one another and suggested people talk to family and friends. One of the residents got up and showed us how she danced to make herself feel better when she was upset; another talked about going for a walk.

May 22 was our last SACLE and the atmosphere was subdued. Three gentlemen who attended were all moving to other developmental centers. Our team assured them they would see us again as we will begin our work in another developmental center in the fall to support residents who will be moving to the community. Our efforts were acknowledged by Charles Westbrook, the quality assurance coordinator at NJDC, when he wrote to Ann Martinelli, “During such a difficult time, I think it was great to have you here.” We agree, Mr. Westbrook.
“Thinking will not overcome fear but action will.” — W. Clement Stone

Fear is a very real emotion that can be paralyzing to individuals. There are many types of fear—the fear of the unknown, the fear of failure, and the fear of success just to name a few. While fear can be justified in many situations, it should not keep you from moving forward. A little fear can be helpful because it gives you an awareness of your circumstances; it keeps you on your toes, which is positive. However, too much fear can make certain situations extremely difficult to handle and make you run away from them, which is negative. One of the ways to control fear is by meeting it head-on. Facing fear is scary, but it is one of the best ways to be in control of a situation. If you leave a situation as it is and not face the fear, you run the risk of making the situation become worse as time goes on. In addition, by facing the fear, you will feel better about yourself and be able to control the situation as you desire to control it. Start to face your fear by relaxing your mind, body, and spirit. Some helpful tips for relaxation are: meditation, deep breathing, taking a walk, and having a massage. Once you are relaxed, you can strategize on how to best tackle the situation you need to face. Remember, as the quote above states, you have to take action to face your fear in order to overcome it.

If you are interested in visiting a provider agency, or learning about other aspects of community living for your loved one, please contact the CLEP at (800) 500-0448 or send an email to clep@sph.rutgers.edu. We are here to serve you!