



EMPOWER

WELCOME PACKET

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# WELCOME

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Welcome to Empower! It is our pleasure to get to know you and to work with you in developing a plan of services and supports that is customized to your needs, interests and goals. This booklet is intended as a supplement to the personal touch of our staff. Please read through it and let us know if there is anything else we can do for you to support you in living the life you choose.

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# MISSION

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Empowering people we support to live the lives they choose.

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# VALUES

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Inclusion: We support people to live as full members of our community.

Dignity: We honor the value of each person we support.

Excellence: We create a culture in which everyone continuously raises the bar.

Accountability: We honor the commitments we make to people, families and partners.

Leadership: We initiate transformative solutions and collaborations to meet community needs.

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# VISION

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People living their best lives, contributing to our community, supported by a trusted and efficient agency.

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# OVERVIEW OF SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

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## Empower Children's Academy

Empower provides preschool programming for children up to five years old, including evaluations, specialized therapies, special classes for preschoolers with a disability and integrated preschool classrooms where preschoolers with and without disabilities learn side-by-side.

**Preschoolers With a Disability** can attend a special education class that has 6 students per one teacher and one teacher's aide or learn alongside preschoolers without a disability in an integrated class. Specialized therapies are also available according to their individualized education plan. See page 9 for information on how to enroll.

**Preschoolers Without a Disability** are offered a phenomenal Pre-K experience that prepares them for kindergarten. Students will learn alongside preschoolers with disabilities, learning empathy and acceptance of all abilities.

### Class Options:

- Operates year-round
- Classes are held Monday through Friday
- Full-day classes (8:40 am to 2:30 pm)
- Half-day classes, either in the morning (8:40 am – 11:10 am) or afternoon (noon-2:30 pm)
- Daycare is available between 8-8:40 am and between 2:30-3:30 pm

### Cost:

- \$24 per day for full day enrollment/\$12 per day for half day enrollment/\$5 per hour for daycare

### Contact Information:

(716) 297-1478, ext. 160, or [rpanattoni@empower-wny.org](mailto:rpanattoni@empower-wny.org).

**Family/Caregiver Family Support Group** meets the first Monday of almost every month at Empower Children's Academy to provide families a chance to meet, share experiences, ask questions and receive support. For more information, please email us at [info@empower-wny.org](mailto:info@empower-wny.org).

**Spectrum Theater Program** is an occasional theater program for children with autism spectrum disorders to improve their social skills. For more information, please contact Robin at (716) 478-9528 or [rstevens@empower-wny.org](mailto:rstevens@empower-wny.org).

# Community Housing

Empower helps people with disabilities throughout Niagara County to live as independently as possible, with the support that they need to reach their goals. Whatever the level of support, our goal is to empower people to live their best lives. *Funding for each of these services is provided through New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, so individuals must be eligible to receive OPWDD services in order to utilize these programs.* Please speak to a care coordinator about how to access housing supports by calling Person Centered Services at 1-888-977-7030.

Through **Community Habilitation**, people learn skills such as grocery shopping, personal finance and using public transportation to live as independently as possible. A trained direct support professional who has gone through a thorough background check will provide this training on a one-on-one basis, usually in the person's home.

**Home or Environmental Modifications** are physical changes to make a person's home more accessible such as ramps or handrails.

**Housing Subsidies** offset the cost of your home or apartment.

**In-Home Respite** is for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities who live at home with family or other caregivers. It gives parents and other caregivers of people with an intellectual or developmental disability time for themselves. A trained respite worker who has gone through a thorough background will spend time with the person at home.

**Community-Based Respite** takes place in a fully accessible hotel. Trained respite workers who have gone through a thorough background check will spend time with a group of individuals in a hotel suite. They also will spend time in the community, doing fun, safe group activities. This program usually takes place over a weekend. It frees the caregiver up to run errands, take a break or even go out of town.

**Geri Rose Garden Apartments**, located in the Town of Niagara, offer comfortable, modern and fully-accessible living environment for people with any type of disability. The 11-unit building is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. There are currently no vacancies. To learn more or to be placed on a waiting list, please contact Empower's Community Housing Division at (716) 297-0798, ext. 134.

**11 Certified Housing Sites** located throughout Niagara County are operated by Empower to provide people with intellectual or developmental disabilities with more structure and support. There is a small number of vacancies at this time, and beds are offered based on urgency of need. To learn more, contact Empower's Community Housing Division at (716) 297-0798, ext. 134.

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# Job Training and Day Programs

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Empower supports people with disabilities in becoming active members of their community and in achieving their personal and/or professional goals. We provide training and skill development to help people get or keep a job, gain valuable life skills and have meaningful experiences. Our services help people improve their self-image, quality of life and independence.

In 2018, Empower completed the integration of its work programs into community settings. The fact that this process was completed three years ahead of the New York State deadline is a testament to Empower's commitment to ensuring people with disabilities are active participants in their communities.

Please speak to a care coordinator about how to access job training and day program supports by calling Person Centered Services at 1-888-977-7030.

**Community Pre-Vocational Programming** provides paid job training, classes, volunteer opportunities, identification of work skills and interests and work-readiness instruction. It is the stepping stone that prepares people with intellectual or developmental disabilities for the world of work.

Empower operates two redemption centers, called **Empties for Empower**, that are located in the Town of Niagara and in the Town of Wheatfield. At these facilities, workers learn on-the-job skills and earn a wage. They run just like regular redemption centers with the added benefits of free bottle sorting for customers and job training for people with disabilities. Workers greet customers, sort bottles and help to run the facilities. Empower earns 3.5 cents for each container it processes, which pays for overhead costs not covered by reimbursement from OPWDD.

At the Town of Niagara Empties for Empower location, **Document Shredding** also is offered, providing another service to customers and another skill-set to workers.

For information, contact Angela at (716) 260-1791, ext. 202, or [agantt@empower-wny.org](mailto:agantt@empower-wny.org).

**Pathways to Employment** is a one-year career discovery program in which participants determine a career goal or objective through job experience, computer class and work with an employment specialist. Observations and interviews help to determine employable skills and employment outcomes. Following these interviews, participants get hands-on work experience through an internship, apprenticeship or volunteer experience. At the same time, employment specialists introduce participants to important employer expectations such as appropriate workplace behavior, acceptable dress and travel training. At the conclusion of the Pathways to Employment program, participants will have a stated career objective, a detailed plan to achieve that objective, and experience to include on a resume. For more information, please contact Mike at (716) 299-0851, ext. 402, or [mmarra@empower-wny.org](mailto:mmarra@empower-wny.org).

**Employment Training Program** offers paid internships with potential employment at the conclusion of the internship. Interns typically work 4 to 12 hours per week, with the length of the internship varying by business. Monthly classes that enhance the intern's work skills and improve job retention, such as time management and conflict resolution, are included. This program is designed to develop relationships and experiences that give interns a competitive edge in the workforce. For more information, please contact Mike at (716) 299-0851, ext. 402, or [mmarra@empower-wny.org](mailto:mmarra@empower-wny.org).

**Empowered to Work Job Placement Program** helps people with any New York State disability that serves as a barrier to work meet their job goals, and improve self-esteem and friendships through job experience. Some of the services provided include development of job opportunities in the community, job placement and job coaching before-, during and after job placement. Empowered to Work is certified by OPWDD, NYS Office of Mental Health, Niagara County Department of Mental Health Services, and Offices of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES-VR). For more information, please contact Mike at (716) 299-0851, ext. 402, or [mmarra@empower-wny.org](mailto:mmarra@empower-wny.org).

**Family Support Services** supports people, age 21 or older, with an intellectual or developmental disability who live at home, in developing independence, promoting choice and advocating for personal/community needs. Social skills building, training groups meet twice a week, and three community integrated outings per month are provided. For more information, please contact Angela at (716) 260-1791, ext. 202 or [agantt@empower-wny.org](mailto:agantt@empower-wny.org).

For people who are more interested in getting involved in their community but not in obtaining employment, Empower offers **Day Habilitation and Day Habilitation Without Walls**. These programs provide opportunities for volunteer work, and community outings such as shopping and visits to parks. The Joseph O. Mineo Day Center is a site-based day program located at 7425 Buffalo Ave in Niagara Falls. Empower's Day Habilitation Without Walls program is a community integration program with hubs at 3571 Niagara Falls Blvd. in Wheatfield, and 8962 Porter Rd. in the Town of Niagara. Participants spend as much time as possible in the community. For more information, please contact Jamie at (716) 283-4818 or [jzimmerman@empower-wny.org](mailto:jzimmerman@empower-wny.org).

# Empower for Elders

**Empower for Elders** is a social adult day program for older adults who live at home with family. It offers social activities and assistance with personal care in a fun and safe setting with attentive paid staff. While their loved ones are at this program, caregivers get a break. Participants do not need to have an intellectual or developmental disability. A morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack are provided. Financial assistance, some of which is not based on income, often is available through Niagara County's Office for the Aging. Empower for Elders accepts Medicaid through Kalos Healthcare and Elderwood Health Plan. For information, contact (716) 371-0728 or [jzimmerman@empower-wny.org](mailto:jzimmerman@empower-wny.org).



# GETTING THE SERVICES YOU NEED

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## **YOUNG CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

For families who suspect that their child has a disability, please contact Empower Children’s Academy at (716) 297-1478, ext. 160, or [rpanattoni@empower-wny.org](mailto:rpanattoni@empower-wny.org). Empower Children’s Academy is licensed by the New York State Education Department, and specially designed for children ages birth through five, who have speech and language delays, and/or other learning or physical disabilities. We will put you in touch with your school district, who will mail you information on having your child evaluated. Within 60 days, your child will be evaluated on learning, social/emotional development, communication skills, physical development and adaptive living skills. Following the evaluation, you will be part of a discussion with the professional staff outlining your child’s strengths and needs. If it is determined that your child has a disability and is therefore eligible for center-based or integrated special education services, the cost of Empower Children’s Academy program will be covered by **New York State Education Department through Niagara County Health Department Division of Children with Special Needs**. If it is decided that your child does not qualify for special education services, please contact Empower as we can recommend next steps through other programs, including our own private-pay preschool program.

## **ADOLESCENTS & ADULTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

Through the New York State Educational Department, Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) is available for people with disabilities who are at least 14 years of age and who need supports to get or keep a job. To receive ACCES-VR services, please contact ACCES-VR at 888-652-7062 or inquire about a referral from your child’s school. Once ACCES-VR registration is complete, you can choose a disability service provider such as Empower through which to receive job training services.

The New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is responsible for coordinating services for more than 126,000 New Yorkers with developmental disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders and other neurological impairments. It provides services directly and through a network of not-for-profit service providing agencies including Empower.

Everyone seeking services from OPWDD must go through a process called the Front Door. The Front Door provides information on OPWDD and available service options, and determines individual eligibility with an emphasis on person-centeredness and self-determination. To begin the Front Door approval process, please contact OPWDD at 1-800-487-6310. Assistance with the Front Door process is also available through Care Coordination Organizations. If you do not have a care coordinator, please call Person Centered Services at 1-888-977-7030.

## **CARE COORDINATION**

People receiving services through OPWDD are assigned a Care Coordinator to help them manage their services. Empower is affiliated with Person Centered Services Care Coordination.

To learn about or to sign up for Care Coordination, please call:  
Person Centered Services Care Coordination Organization  
1-888-977-7030

To email a care coordinator at Person Centered Services:  
First initial of first name with full last name [@personcenteredservices.com](mailto:@personcenteredservices.com)  
Example: Mary Jones would be [mjones@personcenteredservices.com](mailto:mjones@personcenteredservices.com)

To learn about Person Centered Services Care Coordination and what it offers, please visit <https://www.personcenteredservices.com>. There is an excellent question-and-answer page at <https://personcenteredservices.com/your-answers/>.

**Prime Care Coordination** is the other Care Coordination Organization that supports our region. Empower is a participating provider with Prime Care. You can learn more about Prime Care at [www.primecareny.org](http://www.primecareny.org), or you can call Prime Care at (844) 347-3168.

### **New York State ABLE Program**

New York State Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) is a program that allows individuals and families to save private funds that are exempt from taxes on earnings or distributions for things that help people with disabilities maintain health, independence and quality of life. It is intended to supplement benefits provided through Medicaid, SSI, SSDI, private insurance and other sources. For more information, please visit [www.mynyable.org](http://www.mynyable.org) or call (855) 569-2253.

### **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a Federal disability income program for adults who have worked and now find themselves unable to work due to a disability. There is no online SSI Application. Schedule an appointment with a local Social Security office to file an application. Call 1-800-722-1213

### **Social Security Insurance (SSI)**

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is Federal program for adults and children who meet the definition of disabled and have limited income and resources. It is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people, who have little or no income; and it provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. To apply for SSDI, visit: <https://www.ny.gov/services/apply-federal-disability-benefits> or call (800) 772-1213

### **Special Needs Trusts**

A trust is a legal agreement through which you give money or assets to another person or entity-such as a bank-called a trustee-to manage it for the benefit of the person-the beneficiary. These trusts can provide supplemental needs for the beneficiary throughout his/her lifetime while maintaining eligibility for public benefits or other sources of support. Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State is one provider of a community trust program. For more information, please call (518) 436-0178.

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# REPORTING A CONCERN

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## Appeal and Grievance Procedure

Any person receiving supports from Empower, or advocate for a person receiving supports, may object to decisions that Empower makes about the person's services. Empower has a 5-step process to make sure that all appeals are fairly considered.

1. State your concern informally to your case manager or the person who supervises the site.
2. If the concern is not resolved, contact, by phone or in writing, one of the following people:

The Division Director:

William Krays, Director of Community Housing, at (716) 297-0798, ext. 135, or [wkrayss@empower-wny.org](mailto:wkrayss@empower-wny.org).

Kim Kiely, Director of Job Training and Day Programs, at (716) 260-1791, ext. 207, or [kkiely@empower-wny.org](mailto:kkiely@empower-wny.org).

Mary Hoffman, Educational Services Supervisor, Empower Children's Academy, at (716) 297-0798, ext. 139, or [mhoffman@empower-wny.org](mailto:mhoffman@empower-wny.org).

Director of Program Operations and Quality Assurance, Diane Baehre, at (716) 297-0798, ext. 155, or [dbaehre@empower-wny.org](mailto:dbaehre@empower-wny.org).

Chief Executive Officer Jeff Paterson at (716) 297-0798, ext. 126, or [jpaterson@empower-wny.org](mailto:jpaterson@empower-wny.org).

3. If you are not satisfied with the Agency's decision, you may make an appeal to the Regional Director of OPWDD:

Director  
Western New York DDRO  
1200 East and West Road  
West Seneca, NY 14224  
(716) 674-6300

4. If the Director's decision is also unsatisfactory to you, you may make further appeal to the Commissioner of OPWDD:

Commissioner  
Office of People with Developmental Disabilities  
44 Holland Avenue  
Albany, NY 12229  
(518) 473-1997

5. You may contact the Statewide Commission on Quality Care at any time if the process above is not occurring satisfactorily:

The New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs  
161 Delaware Avenue  
Delmar, New York 12054-1310  
(518) 549-0200

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## REPORTING ABUSE OR NEGLECT

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Empower has a Quality Assurance team that is dedicated to ensuring the safety of the people we support. We proactively monitor all Empower programs, ensuring services and care are of the highest quality. All sites are surveyed annually by a trained independent team. Data gathered from these efforts is analyzed and used to identify trends and to develop preventive strategies.

If it is believed that abuse or neglect has occurred, Empower's Quality Assurance team oversees the reporting, investigation, review, and correction of the incident. You are welcome to contact Empower's Quality Assurance Department with any concerns at (716) 297-0798, ext. 155.

All allegations of abuse and neglect are reported to the Vulnerable Persons Central Register through New York State's Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs. Anyone can make a report to the Justice Center. Mandated reporters include custodians, which are people who have regular and substantial contact with individuals who receive services, and human service professionals who by the nature of their job must report allegations of abuse and neglect. The phone number for the Justice Center is 1-855-373-2122.

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# PRIVACY AND RECORDS

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At Empower, we understand that information about you and your family is personal. We are committed to protecting your privacy and sharing information only with those who need to know and are allowed to see the information to assure quality services to you.

All people who work for Empower in our service/programs and in our Empower administrative offices will follow this notice. This includes employees, persons Empower contracts with (contractors) who are authorized to enter information in your clinical record or need to review your record to provide services to you, and volunteers that Empower allows to assist you.

All information we create or keep that relates to your health or care and treatment, including your name, address, birth date, Social Security number, your medical information, your individualized plan, and other information about your care in our program is kept strictly confidential.

1. Empower will inform each individual it provides services, care, or treatment for of their privacy rights and the privacy practices.
2. Empower shall provide each individual, and/or their personal representative, with the “Notice of Health Information Privacy Practices”
3. The content of the “Notice of Health Information Privacy Practices” shall include:
  - a. The notice describes how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to the information.
  - b. Description of Personal Health Insurance (PHI) uses and disclosures made for treatment, payment, and health care operations.
  - c. Description of other instances of PHI use or disclosure permitted without authorization.
  - d. Statement that other PHI use and disclosure require authorization.
  - e. Statements regarding appointment reminders, fundraising activities, and health-related information.
  - f. Statement regarding the individual’s rights with respect to PHI and how to exercise them.
  - g. Empower’s legal duties with respect to PHI, including a statement that Empower is required by law to maintain the privacy of PHI.
  - h. Information on how to file a complaint or seek more information, including whom to contact.
  - i. An effective date on which the notice is first in effect.

If you have a concern about the privacy of your records, please contact Empower’s Quality Assurance Department at (716) 297-0798, ext. 155.

# TERMS YOU MAY HEAR:

ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis	A method of using behavioral science to improve behavioral issues. Often used with people on the autism spectrum.
ACCES-VR	Adult Career and Continuing Education Services	The state program that helps people with disabilities to find and keep jobs.
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	Landmark 1990 federal law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all parts of public life.
ADL	Activities of Daily Living	Essential activities that most people do without help, including eating, bathing, getting dressed and toileting.
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder	A neurological and developmental condition that affects the way people communicate, interact and behave.
BOCES	Board of Cooperative Educational Services	Public organizations across New York State that provide shared educational programs to school districts.
BPC	Bureau of Program Certification	The division of OPWDD that determines if a facility or program meets state requirements to operate. BPC is part of DQI (see below).
CAS	Coordinated Assessment System	OPWDD's new assessment tool to determine a person's needs.
CCO	Care Coordination Organization	An organization designated by OPWDD to help people and families obtain and manage all of the services they need.
CP	Cerebral Palsy	A neurological condition caused by damage to the brain before, during or after birth, affecting body movement and muscle coordination.
CPSE	Committee on Preschool Special Education	The group of professionals within a local school district who determine a child's (age 3-5) eligibility for special education services and coordinate those services.
CQL	Council on Quality and Leadership	An international organization that promotes best practices in human services through accreditation and training. Empower is accredited by CQL.
CSE	Committee on Special Education	The group of professionals within a local school district who determine a student's (age 5-21) need for special education services and recommend appropriate services.

CSS	Client Service Specialist	A manager who helps the Program Coordinator to support people who live in an Empower ICF.
DD	Developmental Disabilities	A group of chronic conditions that start at birth or during childhood, continue throughout life, and affect the person's major life activities. These may include cerebral palsy, autism, brain injury, down syndrome, and intellectual disabilities.
DDAWNY	Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York	A group of service providers who share information and advocacy in Western New York.
DDP-2	Developmental Disabilities Profile	An assessment used by OPWDD to determine a person's needs in the medical, sensory/motor, cognitive/communication, behavior, self-care/daily living skills, and clinical areas. The DDP2 will eventually be replaced by the CAS.
DDRO	Developmental Disabilities Regional Office	Regional offices of OPWDD that help people apply for services and work with providers to coordinate and improve services. Empower is in Region 1, and the Region 1 DDRO is in West Seneca.
DDSO	Developmental Disabilities Services Office	What used to be called the DDSO is now the DDRO (see above). See also DDSOO.
DDSOO	Developmental Disabilities State Operations Office	While many OPWDD services are contracted to not-for-profit organizations such as Empower, OPWDD also directly provides services through its state-operated programs. State-operated programs are run through the DDSSOs in each region of New York State.
DME	Durable Medical Equipment	Non-disposable medical equipment and supplies for extended use, such as wheelchairs, walkers, and oxygen equipment.
DOH	New York State Department of Health	The department of New York State government that is responsible for public health.
DQI	Division of Quality Improvement and Performance Management	The division of OPWDD that monitors quality and regulatory compliance of OPWDD-funded services operated by not-for-profit providers and OPWDD state operations.
DSP	Direct Support Professional	Staff who work with people with disabilities to achieve personal goals and be as integrated as possible into the community.
E-Mod	Environmental Modification	Changes made to a person's home to ensure his/her health and safety. The cost of E-Mods can be covered by OPWDD; information is available from care coordinators.
EI	Early Intervention	Supportive services to help infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities.

G-Tube	Gastrostomy Tube	A tube that delivers nutrition directly to the stomach, for people who have difficulty eating by mouth.
HIPAA	Health Information Portability and Accountability Act	A 1996 federal law that mandates the protection of private, protected health information.
I/DD	Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	Intellectual disabilities arise before age 18 and result in an IQ of 70-75 or lower. Intellectual disabilities are included in the broader group of developmental disabilities (see DD above). "I/DD" is a term used to include all intellectual and developmental disabilities.
ICF	Intermediate Care Facility	A type of 24/7 group residence for people with I/DD. ICFs generally support people with a higher level of medical and/or behavioral needs than those who live in IRAs or in the community.
ID	Intellectual Disabilities	See IDD above.
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	A 1975 federal law, updated in 1990, that guarantees a "free, appropriate public education" that is individualized to the needs of each student with a disability.
IEP	Individual Education Plan	A document that lays out the services and supports that a child needs to succeed in school. It is tailored to the individual student.
IPOP	Individual Plan of Protective Oversight	A document that lays out the risks and safeguards for a person receiving services.
IRA	Individual Residential Alternative	A community-based, 24/7 residence that provides room, board and individualized services.
IRC	Incident Review Committee	A state-mandated group of Empower board members, staff members and community representatives who review cases of abuse and neglect, and make recommendations for corrective action.
IRMA	Incident Reporting Management Application	A web-based database that service providers such as Empower use to report and track allegations of abuse and neglect.
ISP	Individual Service Plan	A document that acts as a blueprint for a person's services and supports. The ISP will be replaced by the Life Plan over the next year.
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse	A nurse who provides more basic nursing care and comfort than an RN.
MHLS	Mental Hygiene Legal Service	A New York State agency that represents, advocates and litigates for people receiving care in state-funded facilities.



MOLST	Medical Orders Life Sustaining Treatment	A doctor's order for people with life-threatening medical conditions, spelling out the person's wishes for end-of-life care.
MSC	Medicaid Service Coordination	Before Care Coordination Organizations were formed, Medicaid service coordinators working in not-for-profit organizations helped people to arrange their OPWDD services. MSC was replaced by Care Coordination in 2018.
NYSED	New York State Education Department	The New York State department that oversees all public schools, colleges and universities, cultural institutions, and licensing of professions.
OCFS	New York State Office of Child and Family Services	The New York State agency that oversees and provides various services to children, youth, families and vulnerable adults – including daycare licensing, child protective services, foster care and adoption.
OPWDD	New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities	The New York State agency responsible for services and supports for New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
OT	Occupational Therapy/Therapist	A type of therapy that helps people with disabilities, illnesses and injuries to improve or maintain their daily living skills such as dressing, cooking and eating.
PC	Program Coordinator	The lead Empower associate responsible for the operation of an ICF.
PCP	Primary Care Provider	A health practitioner, usually a doctor but sometimes a nurse practitioner or physician assistant, who oversees a person's general, routine health services.
POCA	Plan of Corrective Action	A set of actions to be taken to respond to a Statement of Deficiencies issued by a regulatory agency.
POMs	Personal Outcome Measures	A set of 21 measurements of a person's quality of life developed by the Council on Quality and Leadership.
PT	Physical Therapy/Therapist	A type of therapy that helps people with disabilities, illnesses and injuries to improve movement and manage pain.
QA/QI	Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement	Empower's Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Department includes a professional staff and a set of policies and procedures to ensure people are receiving the best possible services and supports. Generally, quality assurance looks backward to identify and respond to specific cases of abuse or neglect. Quality improvement looks forward to identify corrective actions and ways to

		improve performance, to avoid future cases of abuse and neglect.
QIDP	Qualified Intellectual Disabilities Professional	A staff member responsible for integrating, coordinating and monitoring people’s services in certain OPWDD-funded programs. A QIDP must meet federal and state educational and training standards.
RN	Registered Nurse	A nurse with a nursing diploma and other educational background, who provides medical care, educates people about their health, administer medication, and monitor people’s medical conditions.
SCIP	Strategies for Crisis Intervention and Prevention	Now properly called “SCIP-R” (the “R” stands for “Revised”), SCIP is a proactive intervention model for people with I/DD, including prevention and calming strategies.
SCIS	Special Education Class in an Integrated Setting	A preschool model practiced at Empower and other organizations, that integrates children who have disabilities and delays into the same classroom as “typically developing children.”
SED	New York State Education Department	See NYSED above.
SEMP	Supported Employment	A program that matches people receiving services with paid, competitive jobs that match their skills and interests. A job coach often provides ongoing support.
SIB	Self-Injurious Behavior	A type of repetitive behavior in some people with I/DD, where the person hits, bites or otherwise physically abuses his/her own self.
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance	A federal benefit that allows workers with disabilities to receive Social Security benefits early; to be eligible, a person must have paid into the Social Security system through previous employment.
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	A benefit provided through the federal Social Security Administration to meet the basic needs of people with disabilities as well as older adults and people who are blind, who would otherwise be unable to pay for food and shelter.
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury	An acquired brain injury that happens when a sudden trauma, such as being jolted or hit in the head, causes damage to the brain.

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# LOCATIONS

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## EMPOWER ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

9812 Lockport Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
(716) 297-0798  
(716) 297-0998 (fax)

## EMPOWER CHILDREN'S ACADEMY

9812 Lockport Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
(716) 297-1478, x160  
(716) 205-0044 (fax)

## COMMUNITY HOUSING DIVISION

9812 Lockport Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
(716) 297-0798, x134  
(716) 297-0998 (fax)

## EMPTIES FOR EMPOWER – TOWN OF NIAGARA

4701 Military Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14305  
(716) 545-0023

## EMPTIES FOR EMPOWER – TOWN OF WHEATFIELD

3571 Niagara Falls Boulevard, Suite 12  
North Tonawanda, NY 14120  
(716) 260-1791

## JOSEPH O. MINEO DAY CENTER (DAY HABILITATION)

7425 Buffalo Avenue  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
(716) 283-4818  
(716) 283-4816 (fax)

## DAY HABILITATION WITHOUT WALLS

3571 Niagara Falls Boulevard, Suite 14  
North Tonawanda, NY 14120  
(716) 260-1791

## DAY HABILITATION WITHOUT WALLS/ EMPOWER FOR ELDERLY

8962 Porter Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
(716) 371-0728

## EMPOWERED TO WORK JOB PLACEMENT PROGRAM

4701 Military Road  
Niagara Falls, NY 14305  
(716) 299-0851  
(716) 524-2802 (fax)

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# THE STORY OF EMPOWER

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## **In the Beginning**

In 1954 and 1955, the Council of Social Agencies in Niagara County conducted a survey that indicated a need for services to children with cerebral palsy. In response, through the efforts of the Exchange Club of Niagara Falls, the United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCPA) of Niagara County, Inc., was incorporated in January 1954.

Initially, services were limited to the care and treatment of children with cerebral palsy. Over time, the agency grew to provide a wide range of services to individuals of all ages with disabilities, and to the broader community.

In an effort to create a stronger brand identity, the agency began doing business as Niagara Cerebral Palsy in 2000. In 2015, the agency unveiled an entirely new identity: Empower. This new name was meant to be more person-centered instead of diagnosis-focused.

## **Community Health Services**

In the 1950s, most of UCPA's funding came from membership dues. Those funds supported clinical services, including physical therapy for children who otherwise had to travel to Buffalo for services. Speech and occupational therapy services were added.

The agency's first clinic location was established in March 1955 at the Hancock Building on Falls Street in Niagara Falls. The Niagara Falls Board of Education also provided clinical space at Niagara Street School in the early years. Because of the clinic's focus on children, UCPA's clinical services were traditionally intertwined with the agency's education programs – and the physical clinic location generally moved to wherever the school programs were located.

A dental clinic was created in 2001 at the agency's Lockport Road campus in the Town of Niagara to serve the agency's clients as well as non-disabled patients from the community; with other options available, the dental clinic closed in 2015. In 2006, podiatry and wheelchair clinics were added. The next year, the agency took over the Niagara County Health Department's audiology clinics in Niagara

Falls and Lockport. In late 2015, the audiology clinics were consolidated at Lockport Road, and ultimately were closed in 2020 due to lack of demand.

Empower for Elders, a social day program for frail elders, opened in the Town of Niagara in 2017.

## **Educational Programs**

Along with physical therapy, UCPA's early focus was on educational programs. In the 1950s, children with disabilities were often excluded from public schools.

Fortunately, the Niagara Falls City School District was a ready and willing partner. The district provided space at Niagara Street School for a UCPA preschool program, which began in September 1960. The program later moved to the second floor of 17th Street School. Unfortunately, these facilities were not accessible for students with physical limitations. So, in 1973, both the educational program and the clinic moved to a larger, more accessible site at 245-30th Street in Niagara Falls, a county-run building leased to UCPA for \$1 per year.

Children's services expanded into North Tonawanda for two years. When the number of children decreased in North Tonawanda and increased in the Wheatfield area, the agency began renting space in a former elementary school on Schultz Road in the Town of Wheatfield. As the program grew, even more space was required. In September 1985, UCPA seized the opportunity to rent space from the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo at the former Madonna High School on Girard Avenue in Niagara Falls. As school-age enrollment declined, preschool enrollment increased. In 1987, the agency consolidated its education programs and moved them all to the Madonna site. Shortly after, the Diocese sold the building to a private developer and UCPA began looking for alternative space. In 1990, the agency began construction on a multi-purpose facility on a 12-acre former farm at 9812 Lockport Road in the Town of Niagara. This 23,000-square foot facility would house the agency's administrative offices, clinic and preschool. Construction was completed in 1991.

In 2005, the agency began offering special classes for preschoolers with disabilities, as well as integrated preschool classrooms

For many years, the agency's education program was known as Niagara Children's Education and Treatment Center. In 2015, Niagara Children's began operating as Empower Children's Academy, with a renewed focus on integrating non-disabled children into the program.

## **Job Training and Day Programs**

In 1961, the agency added a Handy Cap Workshop program to provide employment and training opportunities for adults with disabilities. In its early years, the workshop depended on donated space, equipment and materials. The lack of a permanent home and consistent staffing created operational challenges. Finally in November 1964, the workshop moved into the Veterans of Foreign Wars Griffon Post at Hyde Park Boulevard and Seneca Avenue in Niagara Falls, providing 1,500 square feet of dedicated workspace.

A \$25,000 state grant led to three staff positions, and the Community Vocational Rehabilitation Center (CVRC) was born. As contract work increased from 1965 to 1968, CVRC's enrollment and revenue increased as well, and more space was needed. In October 1968, CVRC moved into an 11,000-square foot building at 2103 Mackenna Avenue in Niagara Falls. A 5,000-square foot addition was built in 1979. In 1987, when UCPA's educational programs left the site at 245-30th Street, that building almost immediately became an overflow site for CVRC.

A day habilitation program opened in 1995 in a storefront at 1816 Main Street in Niagara Falls for individuals who are not appropriate for or interested in employment and training. The program moved to 7425 Buffalo Avenue in Niagara Falls in 2002 and remains there today.

In 1998, the agency received a grant to act as the lead agency in a job placement consortium office. The program brought public and voluntary agencies together to promote integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Although the grant ended after three years, job placement services remain a crucial part of the agency.

As part of its Olmstead Act compliance agreement with the federal government, the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities announced in 2013 that all workshop programs would be phased out by 2020 – including the programs housed at both CVRC locations. In response, Empower became the first provider in the state to submit its workshop transformation plan. By January 2018, Empower had fully transformed its job training and day programs to comply with the new federal and state standards. Bottle and can redemption centers were opened in the Towns of Niagara and Wheatfield as job sites, along with a document shredding business. A Day Habilitation Without Walls program was added in Wheatfield as well to support people transitioning out of the workshops, which were closed as of January 2018.

## **Community Housing**

UCPA of Niagara County moved into the residential arena in 1986, when it opened a 10-bed Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) to house individuals with developmental disabilities that are severe enough to prevent independent living. UCPA ultimately opened four ICFs. In 1994, the agency began opening Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) houses, which offer room, board, and individualized service options.

In cooperation with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, the agency built the 11-unit Geri Rose Apartments in 2002 at 3445 Tuscarora Road in the Town of Niagara, directly behind the administrative offices and preschool. The first tenant took occupancy in 2004. The apartments were built for low-income individuals with physical and developmental disabilities who can live independently.

In the 2000s, the agency began to offer in-home supports for people with disabilities, such as in-home respite and community habilitation. In 2016, the agenda added overnight respite to its menu of services through a partnership with local hotels.

## **Leadership and Other Developments**

The agency has always been guided by a volunteer Board of Directors. The first full-time employee was Frank Sirianni, who was hired September 1, 1956, and became the agency's first executive director. Joseph Mineo joined the agency in 1965 as a rehabilitation counselor and served as executive director/chief executive officer from 1967 until his retirement in 2013. At that time, John Reardon was promoted from chief operating officer, a position in which he had served since 2001, to chief executive officer. Reardon left the position and the organization in 2014. Rita Tweedie, the organization's longtime chief financial officer, served as interim CEO until Niagara County native Jeff Paterson was appointed chief executive officer in 2014.

The Human Resources Department was created in 1996 to improve recruitment and retention, and to develop labor and management relations. That same year, a Quality Assurance Department was established to ensure compliance with the ever-growing canon of state regulations, and to implement initiatives to keep the agency's services at the highest level of quality. Medicaid Service Coordination was added to the agency's programs in the 1990s and remained until OPWDD eliminated service coordination from voluntary agencies in 2018.

The agency enjoys a number of affiliations that strengthen its mission. As a longtime affiliate of the Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State, Empower actively participates in the association's

conferences and other services. The Elks and Niagara County Central Rotary Club provide ongoing support. And, through a bequest, in 2002 the Niagara Children's Foundation – renamed as the Empower Foundation in 2018 – was established to support the agency and the professional development of its employees. In 2018, Empower earned the prestigious international Quality Assurances Accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership.

Empower stands ready to expand its services and reach in the coming years. While faced with challenging state mandates and ever-present funding cuts, the agency's 300 employees are excited for a future of continued growth.



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# LEADERSHIP

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## **Staff Leadership Team**

Jeff Paterson  
Chief Executive Officer

Diane Baehre  
Chief Quality Officer

Rita Tweedie  
Chief Financial Officer

William Krayss  
Director of Community Housing

Kim Kiely  
Director of Job Training and Day Programs

Mary Hoffman  
Supervisor of Empower Children's Academy

Eric DesSoye  
Director of Analytics and Special Projects

Brandon Jerla  
Director of Staff Development and Learning

## **Board of Directors**

Thomas Caserta, Jr., Esq., President

Patricia Wrobel, First Vice President

Daniel Vitch, Second Vice President

Stanley Fera, Treasurer

Russell J. Petrozzi, Corresponding Secretary

Patrice Wells, Recording Secretary

Susan Kuznik, Immediate Past President

Kevin Burgess, LMSW

Robert DiFrancesco

Alice Kozen, PhD

Donald Napoleon

Richard Sawicki, DPM

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# WORKING FOR EMPOWER

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Empower is always looking for dedicated and caring people to join its 300-person strong workforce. If you like to help people and want to make a difference, please visit our website for a list of current openings and to complete an online job application: <http://empower-wny.org/about/careers/>.

A job application also can be obtained by contacting our Human Resources Department at (716) 297-0798, ext. 175, or by stopping our administrative offices at 9812 Lockport Rd. in the Town of Niagara.

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# GET INVOLVED/DONATE

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There are a few special people who volunteer their time to Empower programs. Their presence enhances the quality of services provided to the people Empower supports. If you would like to donate your time by volunteering, please visit our website and complete a volunteer inquiry form: <http://empower-wny.org/connect/volunteer/Empower>. You may also get in touch by contacting us at (716) 297-0798, ext. 120 or [kdaloise@empower-wny.org](mailto:kdaloise@empower-wny.org).

Another way to support Empower is by making a contribution. Empower depends on the generosity of its donors to pay for experiences or capital improvements for the people its supports that are not covered by OPWDD. If you would like to make an online donation, please visit our website: <http://empower-wny.org/donations/>. You can also contact us at (716) 297-0798, ext. 172 or [ecardamone@empower-wny.org](mailto:ecardamone@empower-wny.org). Thank you for your support.

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# AFFILIATIONS/ ACCREDITATION

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At the state level, Empower is an affiliate of the Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State (CP of NYS), which is a broad-based, multi-service organization encompassing 24 affiliates that provide services and programs to more than 100,000 people with cerebral palsy and developmental disabilities, as well as resources for families.

Empower also is affiliated with Person Centered Services Care Coordination, an organization that helps people manage services that are received through OPWDD.

Locally, Empower belongs to the Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY), which is a collaborative group of member voluntary agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities. While honoring individual agency missions, it is the intent of the Alliance to assist agencies to develop relationships, promote unified strategies and share risks for the mutual gain with and for the benefit of people with developmental disabilities. Members of each agencies' senior leadership teams serve on DDAWNY committees, and work together to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Western New York.

In 2018, Empower earned basic assurances accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership. The Council on Quality and Leadership is an international not-for-profit, virtual organization dedicated to the definition, measurement and improvement of personal quality of life. CQL's vision is a world of dignity, opportunity and community for all people.

CQL's prestigious Basic Assurances Accreditation confirms that Empower embraces person-centered solutions to improve the quality of life for people receiving supports and services.

When Empower decided to pursue CQL accreditation, we undertook a rigorous process to review and improve supports and services. Throughout the process, we have worked to empower people who receive supports to pursue what really matters in their lives, and achieve their personally defined outcomes. CQL accreditation is a journey, not a destination — we will always be working to become a better organization.

Empower has been awarded accreditation by committing to excellence in 46 specific areas of practice, within 10 broad Basic Assurances categories:

#### Rights Protection and Promotion

The organization implements policies and procedures that promote people's rights.  
The organization supports people to exercise their rights and responsibilities.  
Staff recognize and honor people's rights.  
The organization upholds due process requirements.  
Decision-making supports are provided to people as needed.

#### Dignity and Respect

People are treated as people first.  
The organization respects people's concerns and responds accordingly.  
People have privacy.  
Supports and services enhance dignity and respect.  
People have meaningful work and activity choices.

#### Natural Support Networks

Policies and practices facilitate continuity of natural support systems.  
The organization recognizes emerging support networks.  
Communication occurs among people, their support staff and their families.  
The organization facilitates each person's desire for natural supports.

#### Protection from Abuse, Neglect, Mistreatment and Exploitation

The organization implements policies and procedures that define, prohibit and prevent abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation.  
People are free from abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation.  
The organization implements systems for reviewing and analyzing trends, potential risks and sentinel events including allegations of abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation, and injuries of unknown origin and deaths.  
Support staff know how to prevent, detect and report allegations of abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation.  
The organization ensures objective, prompt and thorough investigations of each allegation of

abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation, and of each injury, particularly injuries of unknown origin.

The organization ensures thorough, appropriate and prompt responses to substantiated cases of abuse, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation, and to other associated issues identified in the investigation.

### Best Possible Health

People have supports to manage their own health care.

People access quality health care.

Data and documentation support evaluation of health care objectives and promote continuity of services and supports.

Acute health needs are addressed in a timely manner.

People receive medications and treatments safely and effectively.

Staff immediately recognize and respond to medical emergencies.

### Safe Environments

The organization provides individualized safety supports.

The physical environment promotes people's health, safety and independence.

The organization has individualized emergency plans.

Routine inspections ensure that environments are sanitary and hazard free.

### Staff Resources and Supports

The organization implements a system for staff recruitment and retention.

The organization implements an ongoing staff development program.

The support needs of individuals shape the hiring, training and assignment of all staff.

The organization implements systems that promote continuity and consistency of direct support professionals.

The organization treats its employees with dignity, respect and fairness.

### Positive Services and Supports

People's individual plans lead to person-centered and person-directed services and supports.

The organization provides continuous and consistent services and supports for each person.

The organization provides positive behavioral supports to people.

The organization treats people with psychoactive medications for mental health needs consistent with national standards of care.

People are free from unnecessary, intrusive interventions.

### Continuity and Personal Security

The organization's mission, vision and values promote attainment of personal outcomes.

The organization implements sound fiscal practices.

Business, administrative and support functions promote personal outcomes.

The cumulative record of personal information promotes continuity of services.

Basic Assurances System of Accountability

The organization has policies and procedures that monitor the presence of each basic assurance.

If you have feedback or suggestions on Basic Assurances, you may contact Eric at (716) 297-0798, x194, or [edessoie@empower-wny.org](mailto:edessoie@empower-wny.org).