



Community

Bayshore Man's Success Story with Easterseals NJ Telehealth Program. Day Habilitation Programs Reopen, Significant Gov't Funding is Secured.



Easterseals group day Habilitation programs are vital to helping so many of NJ's most vulnerable.
Easterseals, NJ

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NEW JERSEY -- Easterseals has limitless examples of how their programs have made a positive impact in the lives of many of New Jersey's most vulnerable. Easterseals believes that every human has the right to live their best possible life and deserves opportunities to live as independently as possible. Here is a local example of why it is so important to support organizations like Easterseals NJ:

Easterseals NJ has been working with Berkeley of Keansburg, NJ, who has Major Depressive Disorder. Berkeley, 62, wasn't sure that he would make it to see 62 at

all. He was helped by Easterseals NJ, when he was given the opportunity to live in a shared HUD house.

Then, three years ago, Berkeley's life was transformed even further when Easterseals NJ helped him find his own apartment with the help of a county subsidy. With guidance from his case manager, he pays his rent and monthly bills. Berkeley never thought that he would be living independently and maintaining a stable home, yet, he is doing it, successfully.

The pandemic caused a significant spike in mental health issues. Due to COVID-19, Berkeley struggled with his sobriety as well as managing his symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder. Berkeley thrives through socialization but because of the pandemic, he was unable to attend his partial care program, CPC Behavioral Health through Easterseals NJ. He felt lonely, bored and unmotivated since March 2020. As a result, he relied heavily on services provided over the phone in Easterseals Telehealth program, by his partial care program caseworker, his Easterseals NJ case manager and clinical coordinator, as well as his psychiatrist from CPC Behavioral Health. They provided coping strategies, problem-solving skills, and motivational strategies. Berkeley often says he does not know where he would be if it weren't for the services provided by Easterseals NJ.

After being closed since the beginning of the pandemic, Easterseals NJ reopened its 5-day-a-week, Day Habilitation programs statewide. The reopening began in June, specifically in Lacey, Sayreville and Oakhurst.

Easterseals NJ's Day Habilitation program works with individuals who have an intellectual and or developmental disability to help assist them in achieving their life goals. For so many families, Easterseals has provided much-needed support that often makes a life-changing positive impact. Participants, who must be 21 or older, are taught valuable life skills through instruction and real-world experiences, so they can better participate in their community. Easterseals provides services that include assisting with social and communications skills, self-care and recreation.

"The Day Habilitation program is a valuable one not only to the participant but to their family members and caregivers," said Brian Fitzgerald, CEO of Easterseals NJ. "All of these individuals rely on the all-day productive and safe program that we as an organization provide to them. We give them a place to go every day, to socialize, to learn new skills, etc.

Easterseals NJ received a \$25 million increase in funding for their Day Habilitation and Community Inclusion programs. This increase is very important for Easterseals NJ overall but specifically for its Day Habilitation program because it get us back on the path to financial sustainability. The program was struggling to operate efficiently as a result of overall lack of operational funding, insufficient reimbursement rates, lack of transportation funding or compensation as well as lack of reimbursement for absenteeism.

In addition to the Day Habilitation funding, the budget also includes \$42 million for increasing Direct Support Professional (DSP) wages, and wages for supervisors.

The budget also included funding for:

-the enhanced residential rate; DSP work is not minimum wage work, and this budget recognizes this

to increase Supported Employment's reimbursement rate to \$63 per hour.

-Supportive Housing rental subsidies for individuals with mental health challenges (\$5 million in funding) ensuring vulnerable New Jerseyans are included in our state's recovery in the year ahead.

-the Division of Deaf & Hard of Hearing (\$500,000) for support communication access, equipment distribution, community education and training, and information and referral to continue to help the deaf and hard of hearing individuals find work.

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