



Innovating with Intention

Agenda

- 01** Introductions
- 02** What is Family Support Services
- 03** Funding
- 04** Lending Library & Sensory Rooms
- 05** Events & Trainings



Introductions

Chris Scaglione

Family Support Services Coordinator

Lyndsey Paulin

Home Services Director





For 78 years, Racker has supported people with disabilities & their families to lead fulfilling lives by providing opportunities to learn & be connected with others. As an agency, we envision a world where all people know they belong. We do so through programs such as:

Early childhood Services

Clinical Services

Counseling for School Success

Community Support Services

Self Direction

Residential & Housing



Family Support Services

Family Support Services

OPWDD

Family Support Services (FSS) is a grant-funded statewide initiative through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Its goal is to provide programs & supports to help families keep their loved ones with developmental disabilities safe & living at home.

It is for people of all ages who live with a loved one or caregiver.

To qualify, a person must:

- Have eligibility through OPWDD
- Reside full-time with a family member or caregiver

Where can FSS be found

OPWDD partners with more than 600 agencies across New York, each offering its own blend of unique services.

Family Support Services

Innovation

FSS programs are uniquely able to curate programming based on the needs in the area, & since each FSS program has its own “work plan,” it is held to diverse guidance, rather than less flexible statewide regulations.

For example, what is offered in NYC may be vastly different than what is offered in Niagara Falls, since it is based on the needs of its own population & area.

Family Support Services

Perks

- Can be any age
- Can be any diagnosis
- Can have no Medicaid (Since FSS is entirely grant-funded)
- Can have Medicaid
 - Can use Traditional services
 - Can use Self Directed Services, if included in their budget

Examples of FSS programming

- Respite
- Financial Relief
- Behavioral Programs
- Skill Development
- Recreational Programming
- Advocacy Programming

Unsure of FSS providers in your area?

Contact:

FamilySupportServices@OPWDD.NY.GOV

Creating Change

FSS plays a critical role in supporting individuals & their families by filling gaps in services. FSS offers flexible, family-centered supports that respond to real life needs. This flexibility allows families to access meaningful assistance even when they are waiting for formal services, are ineligible for certain programs, or need supports that fall outside other service definitions.

FSS programs are uniquely innovative because they are designed around empowerment, proactivity, & prevention rather than crisis response alone. These programs are often designed with the whole family in mind & not just the person who is service eligible, hence the “Family” in Family Support Services. By funding non-traditional supports, FSS helps families maintain stability at home & in the community.

These services are often aimed to prevent caregiver burnout, reduce reliance on higher cost systems, & support individuals in remaining connected to their natural supports.

Creating Change

In addition, OPWDD FSS programs encourage creative, community-driven solutions that evolve with family needs. Providers are able to tailor supports to cultural, geographic, & individual circumstances, fostering inclusive practices & partnerships that are not always possible within more prescriptive service models.

In this way, FSS programs serve as both a bridge & an incubator! Bridging service gaps while piloting innovative approaches that work to strengthen families, promote independence, & enhance quality of life across the lifespan of the person & their natural supports.

Creating Services

Identifying Needs

Creation of new FSS programs begins with identifying unmet needs or areas where families are being underserved. Providers are encouraged to design innovative supports that complement -not duplicate- existing services.

Ideally, this is done in collaboration with regional providers, families & OPWDD.

This ground-up approach ensures the future programs being developed address real needs in the community.

Proposals

Once an idea is formed, the agency would need to create a proposal for OPWDD that outlines the target population, specific supports, & outcome expectations.

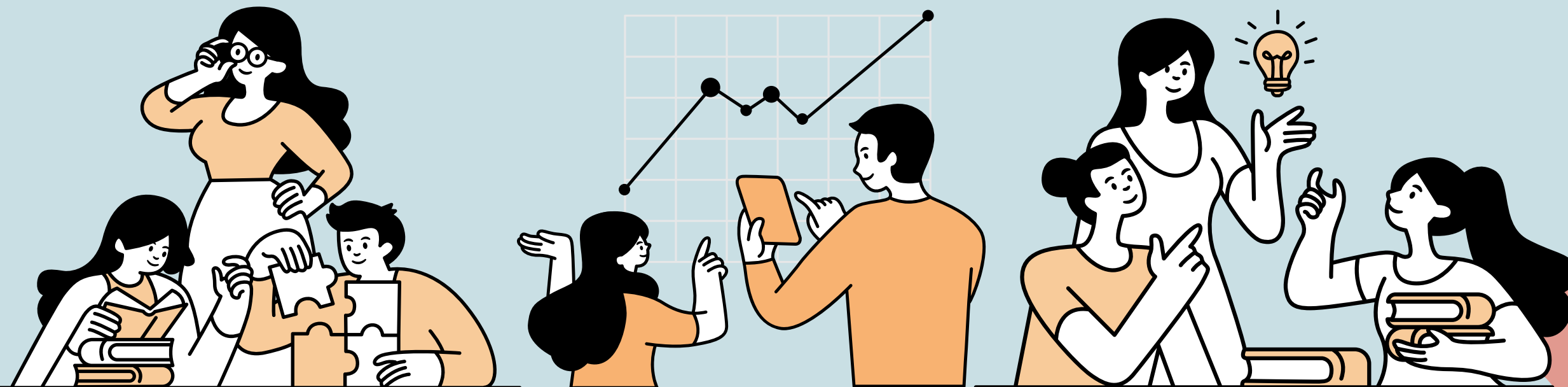
At times OPWDD is open to “Request For Proposals” & other times the “bidding” is closed. It’s important to communicate continuously with the local OPWDD office, to assure proposals are practical.

This request is then reviewed by OPWDD & various committees & councils.

Amplifying Voices

The way FSS programs are created prioritizes family & community voice. Families, self-advocates, & community partners play a central role in shaping these programs by identifying unmet needs, informing service design, & providing ongoing feedback that guides program refinement.

This collaborative approach ensures that FSS remains grounded in lived experience & local context, rather than fixed service definitions. As a result, successful FSS models often inform broader system improvements, influencing how future services are designed & delivered statewide to be more responsive, inclusive, & effective.



Amplifying Voices

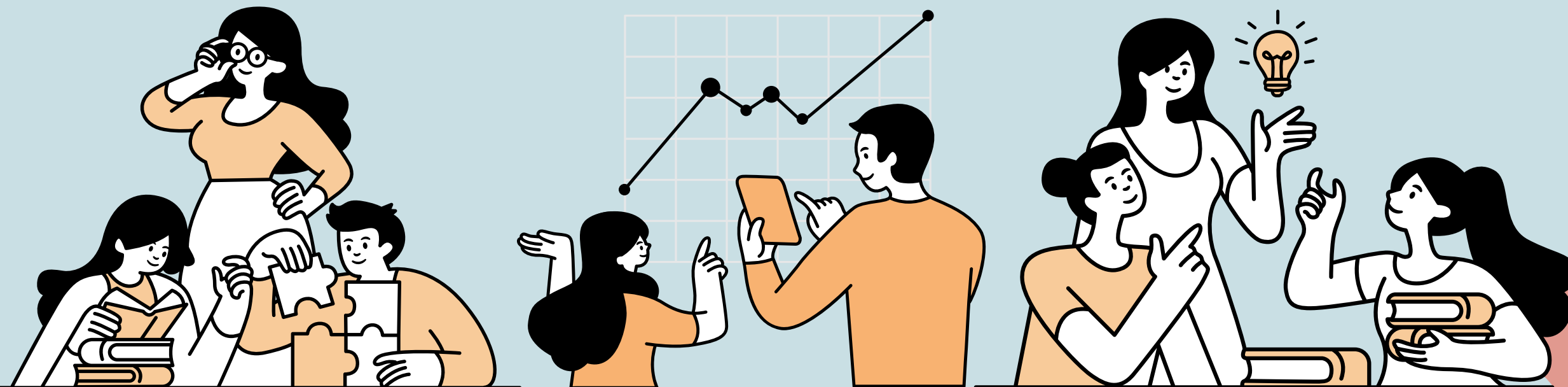
Ask yourself this:

Is your agency tired of systemic barriers to services?

Do you have ideas on how to help families find support faster?

Do you have creative suggestions that do not fit inside other service models?

Family Support Services may be right for you!



Racker's



Autism & Sensory
Lending Library

About us:

Physical Locations

Racker's Lending Library & Sensory rooms are 3 all-ages sensory spaces located in:

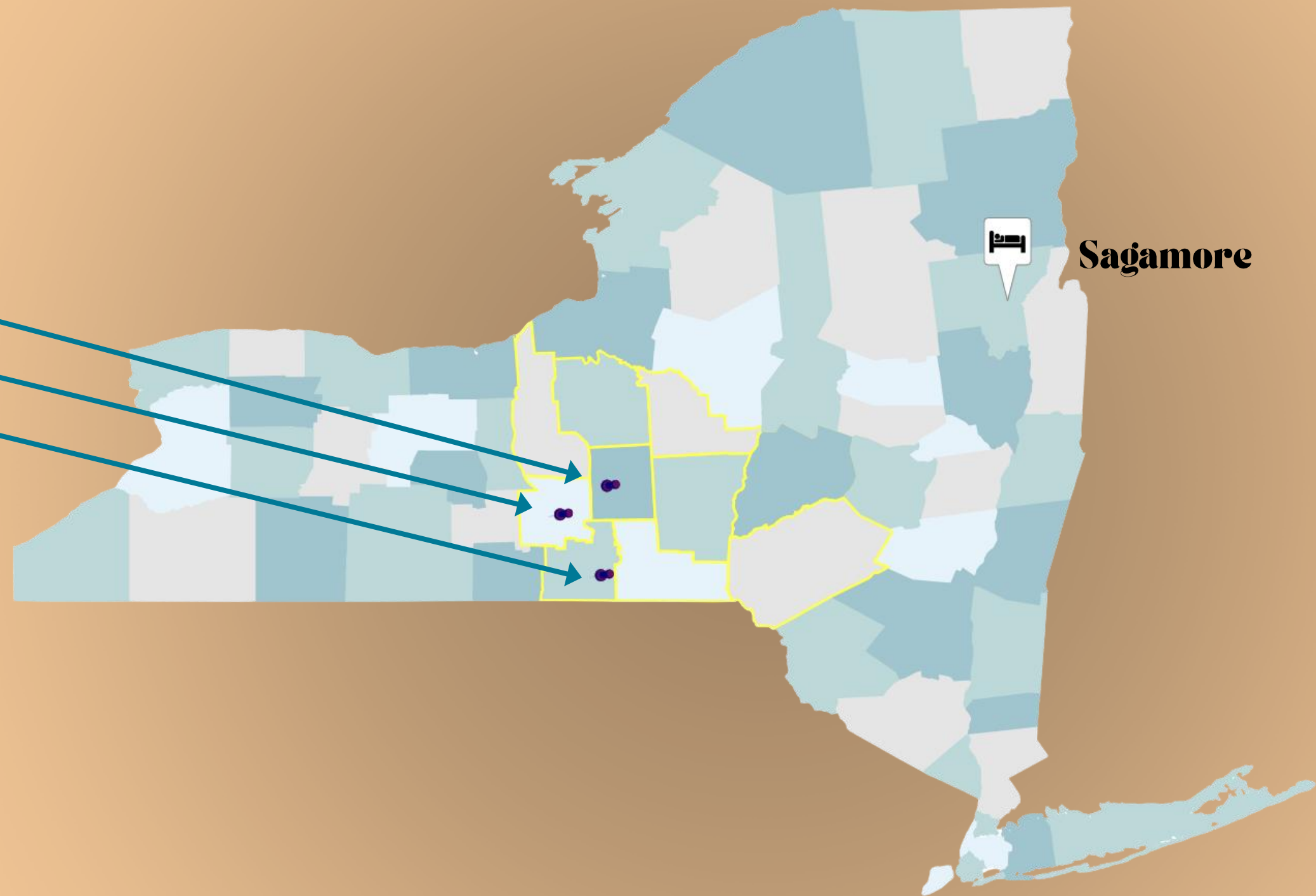
882 NY-13 Cortland, NY 13045

3226 Wilkins Rd Ithaca, NY 14850

146 Central Ave Owego, NY 13827

Additional Coverage:

In addition to our physical spaces, we offer deliveries to eligible families in Tompkins, Cortland, Tioga, Broome, Chenango, Delaware, & Otsego counties. In some cases, we are able to get special approval to serve any county in OPWDD's CNY region.



Our Program's Mission:

To support individuals with sensory needs, as well as their families, caregivers, & educators, by providing:

- Borrowable sensory tools & specialized items such as weighted blankets, compression pods, body socks, & other adaptive materials
- Books & educational resources related to sensory needs & disability support
- Opportunities to explore 1,000s of items in person, regardless of financial barriers
- Support to create sensory-friendly spaces at home or in community spaces
- A community connection point, where caregivers can meet, network, & share

Essentially, the Library helps individuals regulate emotions, explore sensory tools in a supportive environment & empowers them and their families with knowledge & resources.

We have the power to fill in gaps, other programs may leave.

For example: The story of a Door Alarm 

Our Library Services

Hands-On

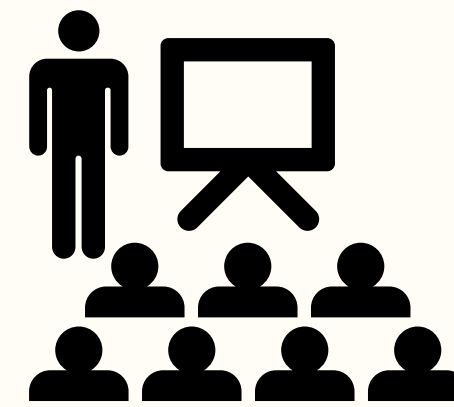
Families, staff, & community members have access to our spaces & items.

We have weekly open hours at each site, make deliveries daily, & have an online digital database for easy look-up & item requests.



Training & Education

Our Library programs also offer a variety of activities, events, & trainings. These are hosted in all 3 of our locations as well as virtually, wherever possible. Our goal is to make these trainings & activities accessible to all members of the family & in some cases we provide transportation.



Hands-On with the



Autism & Sensory
Lending Library

Hands-On

Through Family Support Services, our program has the opportunity to use our annual grant to add items to our inventory, so that families have continued access to items in the library. This access transcends economical & transportation barriers, arming people with tools to meet their loved one's sensory needs, regardless of their background & financial situation.

We work hard to include items for all ages, that help meet the primary **7** senses:



Smell

Sight

Sound

Taste

Touch

Vestibular

Proprioceptive

Vestibular Sense is what gives us spatial awareness & balance. It contributes to signals our brain receives to keep our equilibrium.

Proprioceptive Sense is what helps us know where our body ends, such as knowing where your limbs are, without looking at them.

Consultations

Identifying the Cause

Some families come to us with specific behaviors or concerns they'd like to address or with tools & strategies they're interested in exploring. Others share they feel unsure of where to turn & are seeking support after encountering barriers.

We're happy to meet with families, providers, & behavior specialists to better understand sensory needs & the behaviors connected to them.

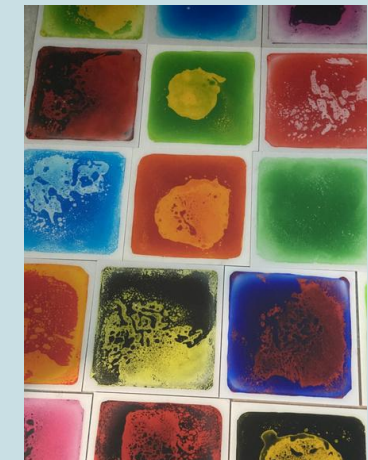


Trialing Solutions

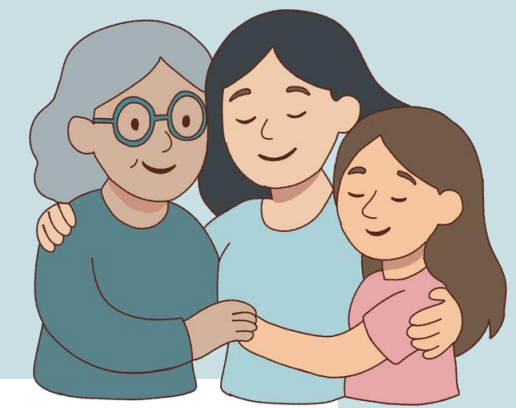
We then take this new information we have learned together & work to:

- Validate the caregivers' experiences & find ways to support them, combating fatigue & feelings over being overwhelmed.
 - Turn fear & confusion into confidence & knowledge
- Introduce tricks, tips, & tools. If something is tried & doesn't work, we have plan b, & plan c already at our fingertips.

Examples of Sensory Items We Offer:



Gabby's Story



"Gabby" was a Kindergartener who came to Racker with her mother & grandmother.

The family was looking to explore fidget tools to use at home & in school. The family was interested in tools such as a crash pad & body sock for home, along with discreet compression clothing for school. While working with Gabby, we learned she was having some aggression in school & the root of it was caused by bullying. As a result, her privacy & dignity was our top priority.

Gabby's mother later shared that the "U" shaped Yogibo has been especially beneficial & allowed her to sleep through a full night. The family came to us with a specific concern & has stayed in the program for the last 2 years, trying a variety of sensory tools. The family also used Library resources to help transition Gabby & family for the arrival of a new baby!



What our Library Families say:

A DnD Family:

(Chris) has been “really great at taking things the boys are experiencing, learning or struggling with and building it into game play during our time at the Lending Library. They’re working on real life Life Skills, emotional regulation, growth, etc while playing; which removes it from being too close and personal and creates a structured environment where they can safely communicate and interact with the lessons learned.

I really appreciate it, him, and all of you at Racker”



A weekly Vistor

Megan loves the lending library and looks forward to visiting each week. Thank you for providing this services as Megan enjoys the variety of fidget toys, games and adaptive equipment. We have been able to enjoy them at home and spend quality time together while Megan learns new skills.

Thank you for this service as it is truly appreciated”



Training & Events with



Autism & Sensory
Lending Library

Making Education & Experience Fun

In addition to our physical offerings, our Library serves as a place of learning. When we hold an activity or event, our first goal is to educate & demonstrate.

Through our FSS grant, we are able to use grant funds to host a variety of events, but that doesn't mean they can't be exciting!

We know many of our Library families have careers, school, & full lives. The last thing some people want to do after a hard day/week is sit down for dry/bland training.

Our job is not only to share crucial information, but to deliver it in a way that engages & excites families!

Examples of Weekly Events We Offer:

MARCH 2026						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2 Book Club Caregiver Group	3	4 Virtual BINGO and in person in Ithaca	5 FIDGET LAB OTHER VOICES IN THE 607 Money for Movement Info session 5-6pm	6	7
8	9 Book Club Money for Movement Info session 1-2 pm	10	11 Virtual BINGO	12 FIDGET LAB OTHER VOICES IN THE 607	13	14
15 Egg Hunt Owego 9-1pm MUSEUM OF THE EARTH SENSORY HOURS & DINO RAFFLE 5-7PM	16 Book Club	17 Happy St. Patrick's Day Cortland Craft Club 4:30-6:00	18 Virtual BINGO and in person in Ithaca	19 FIDGET LAB OTHER VOICES IN THE 607	20	21 Racker Racers
22 Egg Hunt Ithaca 9-1pm	23 Book Club	24 GAME SHOW NIGHT 5:30-7 PM	25 Virtual BINGO and in person in Cortland	26 FIDGET LAB OTHER VOICES IN THE 607	27	28
29 Egg Hunt Cortland 9-1pm	30 Book Club	31 Cortland Craft Club 4:30-6:00				

How Do These Activities Educate?

Adaptive Book Club

Creates an inclusive client-centered space where everyone can connect, learn, & express themselves through books. We offer accessible formats, flexible pacing, & supported discussion. This ensure that every reader can participate meaningfully, foster communication skills, build confidence, & encourage social connections.

Weekly Bingo Night

Offers a fun, social, & accessible way for individuals to build community. We provide clear visual supports, assistive technology, & a welcoming pace which promotes communication, number recognition, & confidence.

Monthly Caregiver Group

Helps connect parents & gives them a platform to explore mutual resources & discuss the good & not-so-good side to caregiving & services they often do not get to share. It is a judgement-free zone where caregivers who are experiencing burnout or crisis can collaborate.

Examples of Past Special Events & Trainings We Offered:

Racker Autism & Sensory Lending Library

JORDAN ALLEN

THE NEURODIVERGENT MAGICIAN

MAGIC SHOWS:

TUESDAY SEPT. 16TH 5-6PM
146 CENTRAL AVE. OWEGO NY

WEDNESDAY SEPT. 17TH 5-6PM
3226 WILKINS RD. ITHACA NY

THURSDAY SEPT. 18TH 4-5PM
29 TOMPKINS ST. CORTLAND NY

EXTRA BONUS

VIP AFTER PARTY FOR THOSE ENROLLED IN RACKER'S LENDING LIBRARY: INCLUDING PHOTOS, AUTOGRAPHS, ACTIVITIES, REFRESHMENTS, & A CHANCE TO WIN A MAGICAL RAFFLE BASKET!

RACKER.ORG/EVENTS

SCAN HERE

SIGN UP HERE OR CONTACT LENDINGLIBRARY@RACKER.ORG

EVENT IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES GRANTS FROM THE OFFICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

Racker Autism & Sensory Lending Library

ADAPTIVE CROSSFIT

With **Sam Fishman**

This exclusive event is open to those with all abilities.

AnyBody & EveryBody
241 CHERRY ST.
ITHACA NY 14850

Sunday November 9th 11:00-12:30pm
Adult Event (Age 16+)

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

SCAN HERE

Events are made possible by Family Support Services grant funding from the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

www.racker.org/events
Need help registering?
Contact (607) 272-5891 Ext 355 or LendingLibrary@racker.org

Racker Autism & Sensory Lending Library

HORSING AROUND

Join the team from Stable Movements

August 31st 12-3pm
146 Central Ave Owego NY

to learn about the benefits of hippotherapy & animal exposure, while meeting with ponies!

VIPs will enjoy a ride in a horse-drawn wagon (300lb weight limit applies).

- OPWDD Diagnosis
- FSS Eligible
- Enrolled in the Lending Library

SCAN HERE

https://tinyurl.com/ma6fbbu

Events are made possible through the Family Support Services grant through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Register here or contact LendingLibrary@racker.org or (607) 529-0142

Racker Autism & Sensory Lending Library

VIRTUAL TRAINING

RAISING KIDS WHO INCLUDE

Join us and our friends at The Nora Project for a ZOOM training on "Raising Kids Who Include". This training is free and open to all.

Together we will discuss supporting disabled children in fostering disability identity, pride, and self-advocacy, while helping all children learn to expect, accept, and advocate for disability inclusion.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 8TH 5-6:30PM

To sign up, contact LyndseyP@racker.org or scan this QR code:

Events like these are made possible by the Family Support Services grant from the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

How do these activities educate?

The Neurodivergent Magician

This event celebrated representation within the Autistic community, highlighting Jordan's lived experiences. Through storytelling & magic, participants can see their identities reflected & valued. The event promotes acceptance, challenges stereotypes, & fosters a sense of pride & belonging.

Adaptive Cross Fit

Fosters a space where individuals with disabilities build strength & confidence, with modified movements, accessible equipment, & coach Sam who is trained in adaptive fitness. The class focuses on functional movement & encouragement, proving that fitness is for everyone. Together we break down barriers, promote wellness, & help every athlete feel strong, capable, & included.

Horsing Around

Introduces participants & caregivers to the world of horse therapy (Hippotherapy) & reduces fears around farm animals. Our horse friends Reese & S'mores (along with their humans) have joined us the last 2 years to discuss services, snacked on carrots, & provided wagon rides. Not only is it a fun time with furry friends but it also helps educate families about therapy resources in our area.

Our **Favorite** Special Event We Offered:

TRUNK OR TREAT & RESOURCE FAIR



In 2023, Racker began hosting a Sensory Friendly Trunk-r-Treat & Resource Fair. This seasonally-inspired event is designed to be welcoming, accessible, & comfortable for individuals with disabilities, especially those who experience sensory sensitivities. Unlike other Halloween events that may include loud music, flashing lights, & large crowds, our sensory-friendly version focuses on creating a calm, predictable environment so everyone can participate. A bonus is that the trunks are hosted by local providers, businesses, & groups.

So not only do families have fun, but they can network & learn about resources in our area.

Since starting this annual tradition, we have seen the event grow & in 2025 we welcomed 505 visitors across 2 days!

Other Voices in the 607

is a weekly Self-Advocacy Group for adults with developmental disabilities. Together the group creates & maintains a safe & supportive space for all members to build critical advocacy skills that enhance their independence & quality of life. The group is facilitated by the Library. They have their own elected officials, bylaws, & charter.

Participants address both personal goals, related to home life, work, & relationships, as well as the broader systemic challenges, such as staffing shortages, Medicaid processes & cuts, & access to supports.

**Meets via Zoom every
Thursday from 6-7pm**



Activity & Prizes

<https://jeopardylabs.com/play/coworkers-4>

Today's Presentation	Advocacy & Empowerment
 For 100 points	For 100 points
 For 200 points	For 200 points
 For 300 points	For 300 points

Harder questions = more points = bigger prizes



**Thank you for
joining us!**