Guild’s Early Intervention Program Offers New Home-based Service

The Guild’s Rifkin Family/Daughters of Israel Early Intervention program addresses the special needs of infants and very young visually impaired children and their families through a year-round program. This September, a new home-based program has been added, which will provide another choice for families of children with visual impairments and other disabilities. Services will be provided in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. The Guild will offer vision, occupational, physical and speech therapies. Children from birth to three years of age will benefit from this new program.

Traditionally, children are referred to early intervention programs by pediatricians or social workers, but referrals can also come from parents or relatives. It is critical for a child who has been diagnosed with a vision problem to receive their services through a multidisciplinary team approach, in order to optimally stimulate a child’s early development. The children who will be part of the new home-based early intervention program have a broad range of vision conditions, such as retinopathy of prematurity, or cortical visual impairment, in addition to other medical conditions.

Families as Partners

The new home-based program is based on Families as Partners (FAP), which promotes a collaborative relationship between families, caregivers, and therapists.

Through informal discussion, modeling, and interchange, the therapist coaches the parents, caregivers, and siblings on strategies and ways to help their child progress. Greater participation by families in all activities usually results in maximum progress by the child. The therapists integrate play activities, toys and materials found in the home into family routines, such as eating or playtime. FAP’s philosophy is to provide services in the natural setting of the home which enables children and families to be more com-
fortable and feel secure. Using the toys and materials found in the home will also increase the chances that recommended activities will be carried out when the therapist is not present.

“As part of its early intervention program, The Guild will continue to offer a center-based developmental group for toddlers between the ages of two and three years,” said Linda Gerra, EdD, Director of the Early Intervention program. “The group helps children develop socialization, play, better communication skills and the independence skills so necessary for children with visual impairments,” she continued. “Parents continue to play a key role in the toddler program and are encouraged to participate in all aspects of their child’s education. Family support groups led by social workers offer the opportunity for parents to meet and discuss their experiences raising a child with a visual impairment,” concluded Dr. Gerra.

For further information on The Guild’s Early Intervention program, call Dr. Linda Gerra at 212-769-6308/6306.

**Guild Joins Call For FMAP Increase**

The Guild has joined with more than 150 leading Jewish organizations across the country in calling on members of Congress to increase the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) as part of its expected new plan for economic stimulus.

FMAP is the formula used to determine the amount of federal funds provided to each state to support that state’s Medicaid program. The last increase occurred in 2003 as part of an economic and tax relief package.

“An increase in FMAP is an effective way to help stimulate our nation’s economy,” said Dr. Alan R. Morse, Guild President and CEO. “In these times of falling state revenues and budget cutting, all states are facing the very real challenge of maintaining service levels while reducing costs.”

Increasing FMAP is widely considered to be an effective way to help states maintain or enlarge the revenue pool needed to provide healthcare and other services to more than 40 million low-income families, children, people who are disabled and often elderly who are enrolled in Medicaid. Traditionally, federal fiscal relief helps states avoid budget cuts and tax increases.
Young Visionaries Gather to Support The Guild

The Guild’s Young Visionaries held their second annual fund-raising event recently in the form of a “casino night” at the Chinatown Brasserie in New York City’s East Village. With almost 100 people attending, the party was a huge success.

The evening was co-chaired by Beth and Zach Solomon, Adam Solomon, Lauren Boxer and Tracey Weintraub. The group is made up of young professionals who come together to heighten awareness of The Guild’s mission and to raise funds in support of its programs and services.

One highlight of the September gathering was a brief address by Kara Black who recently graduated from The Guild’s Pre-college program. The program is designed for blind and visually impaired students who are entering college or returning to complete their undergraduate studies. (See article on page 5).

Since losing much of her vision, Ms. Black has been enrolled in numerous Guild programs including Independent Living Skills and Adaptive Tech Training. She is now studying at Lehman College where she hopes to complete her undergraduate studies and become a social worker.

Save The Date ➤ Wednesday, February 11th, 2009

Palm Beach Vision 2009 ➤ Luncheon and Fashion Show ➤ Four Seasons Resort

Honorary Chairman: Judy Bergman ➤ Events Chairman: Pauline Raiff

For additional information, please call 561-833-9667
2008 Bressler Prize Goes to Specialist in Neuro-Ophthalmology

In September, The Guild awarded its Alfred W. Bressler Prize in Vision Science to Jonathan C. Horton, MD, PhD, Professor in the Departments of Ophthalmology, Neurology and Physiology at the University of California, San Francisco. The 2008 Prize was presented at a luncheon held at the Asia Society, in the presence of the Prize Selection Committee and invited guests.

**Binocular Integration of Visual Function**

Torsten N. Wiesel, MD, President Emeritus of Rockefeller University, New York and recipient of the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology, 1981, moderated the symposium. The speakers and their presentations, which all focused on the “Binocular Integration of Visual Function in the Human Brain”, were:

**Jonathan C. Horton, MD, PhD**, Professor of Ophthalmology, Neurology and Physiology, University of California, San Francisco: *Binocular Integration in the Human Brain*

**Elizabeth Engle, MD**, Associate Professor of Neurology, Children’s Hospital Boston, Harvard Medical School: *Genetic Analysis of Congenital Cranial Nerve Dysinnervation Syndromes*

**Lynne Kiorpes, PhD**, Professor of Neural Science and Psychology, New York University: *Development of Visual Function and Amblyopia*

**Lawrence Tychsen, MD**, Professor, Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, Anatomy and Neurobiology, Pediatrics, Washington University Medical School, St. Louis, MO: *Early Functional-Structural Repair of Strabismus*

Dr. Horton, winner of this year’s Bressler Prize, is widely respected both as an outstanding clinical neuro-ophthalmologist as well as a neuro-scientist. His contributions to neuro-ophthalmology are numerous, and all share a similar goal, which is to bring state-of-the art neuroscience from the laboratory and apply it to important clinical problems facing the clinician, especially in the case of amblyopia and strabismus.

Dr. Horton received his MD and PhD in Neurobiology, from Harvard Medical School. He received his BA in History from Stanford University. He completed his internship and first year of residency training in neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital and completed his residency at Georgetown University Hospital. He completed fellowships in neuro-ophthalmology and pediatric ophthalmology at UCSF. In 1990, Dr. Horton became a full-time member of the UCSF ophthalmology faculty.
The Alfred W. Bressler Prize

The Bressler Prize in Vision Science was established by The Guild in 2001, through a generous bequest of Alfred W. Bressler (1905-1999). Mr. Bressler was a noted New York attorney who enjoyed a distinguished legal career for more than 70 years, most of that time with the prestigious law firm of Moses & Singer.

For more information on The Alfred W. Bressler Prize in Vision Science, call Gordon Rovins, 212-769-7801 or e-mail bressler@jgb.org.

2008 Bressler Symposium Speakers: Elizabeth Engle, MD (left); Torsten N. Wiesel, MD; Jonathan C. Horton, MD, PhD; Lawrence Tychsen, MD; and Lynne Kiorpes, PhD (front).

Guild Prepares Students for College

As it has done every year since 1986, The Guild held its college preparatory course for visually impaired students this past summer. Each student who attended the course had already obtained college acceptance and was recommended to The Guild by the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped.

The six-week course of study, offered by The Guild’s Rehabilitation Services Department, simulates a college environment in terms of workload demands. Classes are given on note taking, library research, term paper writing and study skills. Discussion groups run by a member of staff who is blind, cover college life as a blind or visually impaired student will find it. Students entering the pre-college program must have a high school diploma, be able to travel independently and have received a college or university acceptance. For more information, call Lauri Filan, Supervisor, Communications Skills, at 212-769-6287.
Back to School – Back to Work!

The school year has commenced once again at the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn School at The Guild, and Guild students are back at their studies, which includes, for certain students 14 years and older, time spent as an intern in either a local commercial business or a non-profit organization.

Currently there are eight organizations where Guild students work several hours each week. These range from the mail rooms at The Conference Board, Hunter College and Simon & Schuster, to the Volunteer Services Department and the café at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center. The American Museum of Natural History, Barnes & Noble bookstore, the Senior Center at Project FIND and The Children’s Place clothing store are also supporters of the school’s work/study program.

While the students’ help is greatly appreciated and they always enjoy their work, the intention of the school’s work/study program is to increase self-confidence and to help students who have multiple disabilities learn how to cope in the world beyond school.

Breaking Down Barriers

“Traditionally, children with special needs have been sheltered from society. This program helps break down barriers for them,” said Patricia Finocchiaro, Principal of The Guild School.

All of the employers welcome the “eager to help” attitude of the Guild students and they enjoy having the younger people on site. All of the student interns work at least one hour each week under the supervision of their job coach, a member of the Guild School staff, who accompanies them to their jobsite.

At Project FIND, a not-for-profit organization that runs three long-term housing residences and five senior centers for older adults living on the upper west side, Guild interns set up napkins and silverware for the daily lunch service. Students who work in the Volunteer Services office at St. Luke's-Roosevelt are assigned light office work, such as copying, collating and stapling.

Real Everyday Situations

These jobs allow Guild students to experience a wide range of real-life everyday situations that help them develop interpersonal skills, good judgment and self-confidence. The internships provide job skills, but even more importantly, they give the students a sense of accomplishment and self-respect.

The Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn School at The Guild serves students aged 5 through 21, who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind and have additional disabilities. The Guild School’s curriculum offers its students the opportunity for active participation and involvement in literacy learning, computer technology, basic academic skills and vocational training. For further information, contact Patricia Finocchiaro, at 212-769-6200, ext. 390.
Employment Development Gets Recruiter Back on the Job

Manhattan resident Brian Fischler, who is losing his sight due to Retinitis Pigmentosa, recently took a new job as an Executive Recruiter by day and continued to be a standup comic by night. Referred to The Guild’s Howard A. Newman Employment Development program by the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, Mr. Fischler was placed with Starpoint™ Solutions as an Executive Search Consultant.

Mr. Fischler’s day job for many years was first as a Creative Executive with Davis Entertainment in Los Angeles, and then as an Executive Recruiter with NPF Associates Ltd., Inc., in New York City.

As his eyesight became worse, the challenges of the workplace grew greater and he discovered that he needed to learn new techniques designed to keep a person with visual impairment competitive on the job front. With that goal in mind, he came to The Guild.

In addition to his work as an Executive Recruiter, he has, for some time, been pursuing a career as a standup comic, and is currently preparing for the third in a series of fund raisers organized through his foundation, Comedians Unite for Sight, to be held at New York City’s Gotham Comedy Club. The proceeds of the event, Laugh for Sight, will be donated to the Scheie Eye Institute at the University of Pennsylvania.

For information on The Howard A. Newman Employment Development Program, call 212-769-6296 or e-mail jobdevelopment@jgb.org.

GuildCareSM Yonkers Moves to New Premises

In October, GuildCare, The Guild’s Adult Day Health Care program serving Yonkers and Westchester County opened its new premises at 4 Executive Plaza, Yonkers. The new facility has been specially designed to meet the needs of the growing number of visually impaired, medically frail individuals who attend the GuildCare program.

GuildCare’s new site is located near St. John’s Riverside Hospital, only minutes from the Saw Mill River Parkway and close to the Cross County and Sprain Brook Parkway.

GuildCare is offered in five locations in New York State: Albany, Buffalo, Manhattan, Niagara Falls and Yonkers, as well as in Boston, MA. GuildCare has been serving blind and visually impaired residents of Westchester County since it began operating in Yonkers in 1985.

For further information on the GuildCare program, call: Albany, 518-396-3626; Boston, 617-323-5111 ext.122; Buffalo, 716-885-8041; Manhattan, 212-769-6262; Niagara Falls, 716-285-3499; Yonkers, 914-220-8500.
Preschool Graduation Day At The Guild

The Elizabeth L. Newman Preschool at The Guild held its annual graduation ceremony in early August. There were 18 graduating students in this year’s class, 11 of whom started their student careers as infants and toddlers in The Guild’s Early Intervention Program.

After Preschool Director Linda Gerra’s welcome, two parents, Jennifer Aquino and Rebecca Ramos, spoke about how much the Preschool meant to them and to their children who were in the graduating class. A slide show presentation of each of the 2008 graduates was followed by Music Therapist Rhonda DeFiore leading the class in a series of songs and dances. The ceremony closed with the presentation of diplomas and gifts.

The graduates of The Guild Preschool will be going on to a number of different schools, including the New York Institute, regular kindergartens in the Board of Education, Lavelle School for the Blind, Mt. Pleasant-Blythedale School and the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn School at The Guild.

The Elizabeth L. Newman Preschool provides educational services for children aged three to five years, who are blind or visually impaired and often multi-handicapped. For further information, contact Linda Gerra, EdD, at 212-769-6306.
News From The Guild

GuildNetSM Celebrates Eight Years With Employee Breakfast

GuildNet, The Guild’s managed long-term care plan, celebrated its eighth anniversary in July with an Employee Recognition breakfast. Staff gathered not only in The Guild’s City Center auditorium, but were linked by phone to the Brooklyn, White Plains and Melville offices. GuildNet’s Executive Vice President Wanda Figueroa-Kilroy congratulated her staff on their anniversary and thanked them for their dedication. Employees who had been with GuildNet for five years were acknowledged with certificates of service.

Guild Receives Award from HANYS

The Guild’s Public Relations Department has been awarded the 2008 Public Relations Excellence Award by the Hospital Association of New York State. The award recognizes the careful and complete way that The Guild handled all of the communications aspects of relocating its Home for Aged Blind, especially with regard to television, newspaper and magazine coverage. The award was accepted by Alison Schlesinger, Vice President, Marketing and Communications.

Hadley School’s President Visits Guild

Charles E. Young, President of The Hadley School for the Blind in Winnetka, Illinois, visited The Guild recently. He was accompanied by Daniel Callahan, Director of The Guild’s Children’s Vision Health Initiative. The Hadley School is the largest worldwide distance educator of blind and visually impaired people, their families and blindness service professionals. Mr. Young was formerly the Director of the Oregon Commission for the Blind.

Guild Welcomes Foreign Visitors

In September, The Guild welcomed two visitors from abroad: Kazue Tatsumi, from the Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences in Japan, and Celia Velid, from the Alice Betteridge School, part of The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, at North Rocks, Sydney, Australia. Both were given tours of The Guild’s City Center, with a special emphasis on vision rehabilitation programs and the School and Preschool programs.

The Guild Newsletter is available on tape through The Guild’s Communications and Public Information Department. It is also posted on The Guild’s website: www.jgb.org. For information call 212-769-6268 or e-mail kellerv@jgb.org.
Guild Board Chairman James M. Dubin was elected to the System Board of The Jewish Home & Hospital Lifecare System (JHH); Guild Board Treasurer Lawrence E. Goldschmidt was elected to the Community Services Board of JHH; Guild President and CEO Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, was elected to the Bronx Board of JHH.

Dr. Morse, and Guild Director of Vision Program Development Roy G. Cole, OD, presented “The SightCare Model for Low Vision Rehabilitation: Part of the Continuum of Vision-Related Health Care” at The 9th International Conference on Low Vision, in Montreal. Dr. Cole also presented “Prescribing Distance Glasses to New Patients in a Low Vision Specialty Practice”.

Bruce Mastalinski, Guild Executive Vice President, Program Operations, was re-elected Treasurer of the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (NYAHSA). He was also appointed Chairman of NYAHSA’s Finance Committee as well as its Dues Restructuring Task Force.

César A. Alfonso, MD, Psychiatrist in The Guild’s Behavioral Health Services Department, recently returned from the Mae Tao Clinic in Thailand, where he assisted in treating refugees displaced after Cyclone Nargis severely damaged Burma’s Irrawaddy Delta. Dr. Alfonso, President-Elect of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry, has written an article detailing his experiences at the Mae Tao Clinic, scheduled for publication in the winter issue of the Academy Forum.

Sarah Ann Spicehandler joins The Guild as Executive Assistant to the CEO and Assistant Secretary to the Board of Directors. Before joining The Guild Ms. Spicehandler was Administrative Assistant at the office of Davis Polk & Wardwell, attorneys, and before that she was Senior Legal Administrative Assistant at Bank of America, both in New York City. She received her BA from Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, NY.

Marie Jessy Edouard, RN, MBA, joins The Guild as Director of GuildCare Boston. Before joining The Guild, she was Community Case Manager with Mount Auburn Cambridge Independent practice Association in Brighton, MA. She received her nurse’s training at Blue Hills Regional Technical School, Canton, MA, her MBA from Curry College, Milton, MA, and her BS from Emmanuel College in Boston.

Julia Kagen has been promoted from Senior Accountant to Accounting Supervisor. Ms. Kagen joined The Guild in 1996.

Alethea Pietri, RN, has been promoted from GuildNet Case Management Specialist to Appeals Supervisor. Tracy Cheatham, RN, has been promoted from Nurse Case Manager (NCM) to Staff Development Specialist for GuildNet. Doris Gross, RN, has been promoted from NCM to Nurse Case Manager – Preceptor. Mindy Nardi, RN, has been promoted from NCM to QA/PI Specialist.

Wali Ahmed, RN; Jacqueline Brown, RN; Caryn Donocoff, RN; Jennifer Espiritu, RN; Maureen Helbig, RN; Lucie Momplaisir, RN; Alice Ngo, RN; Tonita Rodgers, RN, and Oksana Zagorodneva, RN, join The Guild as Nurse Case Managers for GuildNet.
Judith L. Cohen, LMSW, joins The Guild’s Behavioral Health Services as a Social Worker for the Developmental Disabilities Day Treatment Program. Before coming to The Guild, she worked for Spectrum for Living in Rockleigh, NJ. She received her MSW from NYU and her BA from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland.

Leigh Ann Zeller, LMSW, joins The Guild as Social Worker for GuildCare, Albany. Before coming to The Guild, she worked for the Eddy Visiting Nurses Association in Troy, NY. She received her MSW from the University of Kansas and her BA from Rockhurst University in Kansas City.

Londa Knapp, RN, joins The Guild as Program Nurse for GuildCare, Albany. Before joining The Guild, she worked for the Eddy Visiting Nurses Association in Troy, NY. She received her nurse’s training at Adirondack Community College and SUNY, Morrisville.

Claudia A. Miller, RN, BSN, joins The Guild as Compliance and QI Manager for GuildNet. Before coming to The Guild she worked for Affinity Health Plan in the Bronx as Manager, Medicare QI. She graduated from the Milwaukee County General Hospital School of Nursing and received her BSN from the University of Wisconsin.

Kerry Heller, MS, joins The Guild as a Teacher in the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn Guild School. Before joining The Guild, she was a Teacher at the Thomas Giordano Middle School in the Bronx. She received her MS from Mercy College and her BA from Western Connecticut State University.

Sheila McElhearn, TVI, MS, joins The Guild as a Teacher in The Guild School. Before joining The Guild, she worked for the Long Island Infant Developmental Program in Merrick, NY. She received her TVI license from Hunter College, her MS from Adelphi University and her BS from SUNY Geneseo.

Lisa Gonzalez, MS, joins The Guild as a Teacher in The Guild School. Before joining The Guild, she taught at the West End Day School in Manhattan and before that at the Lavelle School for the Blind in the Bronx. She received her MS from Hunter College and her BS from Dominican College in Orangeburg, NY.

Carolyn T. Feenaghty, MS, joins The Guild as a Teacher in The Elizabeth L. Newman Guild Preschool. Before coming to The Guild, she taught at PS138M, a Special Education District 75 school in Manhattan. She received her MS from Hunter College and her BS from Boston College.
Children’s Canes To Get Electronic Feedback Device

Stuart Filan, Guild Orientation and Mobility Instructor, joins the Advisory Board of Touch Graphics, Inc., for a project entitled “WiiCane: An accelerometer-based diagnostic and real-time feedback tool for therapeutic play in mobility training for blind and deaf-blind children”. The system promotes the proper use of the long cane in orientation and mobility training for young children.

Touch Graphic’s research team will mount a WiiMote, a low-cost wireless motion sensing device, on a child’s cane. As he or she moves along a course, the WiiMote will stream data to a computer, which will analyze the student’s performance and provide real-time audible and vibratory feedback.

“The WiiCane’s concept is incredible and could be a major breakthrough for our students in terms of independent learning,” said Mr. Filan. “Currently, students who are participating in Orientation and Mobility instruction rely on the instructor for real-time feedback, comments, praise or criticism,” he continued. “If successful, the WiiCane will provide students with the opportunity to independently play and travel at school and even at home while receiving audible or tactile feedback on their movements and direction setting, as well as cane-use on a real-time basis.”

Touch Graphics was recently awarded a Steppingstones of Technology grant from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, to develop the project. From its base in New York City, Touch Graphics, creators of the Talking Tactile Tablet, researches and develops computer products for students who are visually impaired.