

what you don't know about people inc.

By Annette Pinder

Founded in 1970 as a grassroots effort by a group of parents, People Inc. now has 3,860 employees, 193 locations, and is providing services to more than 12,500 individuals from infants to seniors. Through a variety of programs, including residential, supported employment and vocational services, senior services, health care, respite, senior companions, and community outreach, People Inc. helps people with disabilities and their families, live healthier, independent, and productive lives.

In all the years I have been working with People Inc., I am constantly amazed by the ever-growing services they provide. Just when I think I know exactly what the agency does, I learn about new programs being undertaken. It was definitely time to interview People Inc.'s President and CEO, Rhonda Frederick, who has worked at the agency for for the past 37 years.

Frederick, who displays unbounded passion for the agency's initiatives, probably knows more about People Inc. than anyone else.

Frederick is happy about the recent partnership with two similar agencies, Rivershore in Niagara County, and Southeast Works, and continues to expand its services in Rochester. Headway of WNY, an affiliate, provides support and advocacy to people with brain injuries and other disabilities. Another affiliate, Elmwood Health Center, provides easy access to all people, and offers comprehensive medical services, including adult and pediatric medicine, gynecology, neurology, podiatry, psychiatry, counseling, hearing and speech evaluations, occupational and physical therapy, nutritional services, and more. And the Museum of disABILITY History, a project of People Inc., helps advance the understanding, acceptance and independence of people with disabilities.

There are endless stories to tell – from Libby, who was thrilled to live in a People Inc. senior apartment in Hamburg, next to the tree she loved, to her daughter who, years later, moved into the same apartment building. The agency now has 19 affordable senior apartment buildings in beautiful, affordable, secure communities, complete with activities.

A new housing complex, Highland School Apartments in the City of Tonawanda, offers 38 apartments to a diverse group of people who are 18 years and older, with and without disabilities, who are income-eligible. A community lounge equipped with wi-fi and laundry



Rhonda Frederick, President and CEO, and Jill Turchiarelli, Receptionist at People Inc.

facilities, creates the perfect environment to make new friends, and renters can have one small pet.

There are many opportunities for volunteers and employees at the agency, and Frederick encourages people to visit people-inc.org to see what they are. She is especially proud of their staff, who say they get much more back than they give in advocating for people's needs. Volunteers also often become employees. One staff-member, who retired in his 60s, is now employed as a team leader. "The greatest need is for direct support professionals who work hands-on with individuals with disabilities," says Frederick, who successfully educated legislators through a statewide initiative known as "be fair to direct care," that resulted in a promised salary increase of 6.5 percent in 2018.

Whether it's People Inc. receptionist Jill Turchiarelli, who has cerebral palsy, the guys whose dream it was to travel cross-country and create a documentary about the experience, those receiving afternoon respite care, or the individuals living with loving families as a result of the Perfect Fit Program, there is a lot to write about in future issues of Buffalo Healthy Living, so stay tuned.

Learn more about all of People Inc.'s programs at www.people-inc.org or call 716-817-7400.

As appeared in the July 2017 Issue of
Buffalo Healthy Living Magazine