

Valuable Online Tools for the Special Needs Practitioner

By JulieAnn Calareso and Lisa DeKenipp

It is vital that any practitioner involved in planning for persons with special needs be familiar with what resources are available to serve their clients and their families. The Special Needs Planning committee of the Elder Law Section has devoted some of its efforts to gathering information pertaining to the various not-for-profit agencies serving the special needs community. The Committee believes that Elder Law practitioners and those working with the special needs community should be familiar with the different services available to be able to best inform clients of possible resources.

The members of the subcommittee working on this project set out to provide a comprehensive listing of the agencies and services available. However, in our efforts, we discovered that our time would be better served informing the Section's members of some already existing research tools that can point a family in the direction of needed services.

One terrific tool is the searchable database on the website for the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities—www.omr.state.ny.us. This website has a listing, by county, of various not-for-profit agencies serving the special needs community. A geographical search can be done, as well as a search by type of service. To start a simple geographic search, start at the home page of the OMRDD website, and follow the link under "Services." Select "Map the Agencies" and follow the prompts to select a particular county, a particular service, or a combination thereof. In addition, you can search for all services within one particular county for all services within a geographic radius of a particular location. This will be most beneficial in some of the more rural areas, where it may be necessary to expand the scope of the search in order to find the most appropriate services.

This website is incredibly helpful, as it lists the various services that can be searched for. These services include: Camp, Counseling, Crisis Intervention, Day Services/Day Habilitation, Employment Services, Environmental Modifications (E-Mods)/Adaptive Equipment, Evaluation, Intake and Referral, Family Care, Family Support Services, Financial Assistance, Forensic Services, Health Care, Housing/Individual

Support Services, In-Home Services, Parent Advocacy and Training, Recreation, Residential Services, Respite Services, Service Coordination, Transportation, and Waiver Services.

In addition to the terrific research tool at the OMRDD website, the New York State Office of Mental Health also has a terrific website with searchable features. This website is www.omh.state.ny.us. This website also has a "locate provider by county" feature. Starting at the home page, look at the center of the page under "Mental Health Resources." Select the second tab, called "Find a Program." Click on "Find a Mental Health Program in Your Community" and follow the prompts to enter a county and subcategory of services.

The OMH searchable directory covers five main categories of services, with 22 subcategories, as follows: Emergency (including Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program and Crisis); Inpatient (including General Hospital Psychiatric IP Unit, Private Psychiatric Hospital, Residential Treatment Facility, and State Psychiatric Hospital); Outpatient (including Assertive Community Treatment, Clinic Treatment, Continuing Day Treatment, Day Treatment, Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Partial Hospitalization, and Personalized Recovery-Oriented Services); Residential (including Support Program, Treatment Program and Unlicensed Housing); and Support (including Care Coordination, Education, Forensics, General Support, Self-Help and Vocational).

In addition to offering the searchable databases on services, these two websites also have valuable information for practitioners who are familiarizing themselves with the services available to persons with special needs. The websites are very user friendly, and should be a terrific starting point for Elder Law practitioners who need to familiarize themselves with the services of OMRDD and OMH.

The Special Needs Planning Committee thanks JulieAnn Calareso of Burke & Casserly, P.C., and Lisa DeKenipp of Mazur, Carp, Rubin & Shulman for compiling this information.