



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 29, 2008

**CONTACTS: Nicole A. Weinstein, Acting Director, Office of Public Information
518-474-6601 or Nicole.Weinstein@omr.state.ny.us
Marlena Gernett, Museum of disABILITY History,
716-817-7429 or mgernett@people-inc.org**

CELEBRATE DISABILITY HISTORY MONTH BY TEACHING DIVERSITY

ALBANY, N.Y.: October is Disability History Month and New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) Commissioner Diana Jones Ritter wants New York State citizens to be aware of some of the wonderful educational tools available through OMRDD and its collaborative partners that can help teach both children and adults about developmental disabilities as well as about the history of the disability movement.

“While October is Disability History Month, disability awareness should be celebrated each and every day,” said Ritter. “As the leader of an agency that helps people with developmental disabilities lead richer lives, it is also my firm commitment to educate the public about people with disabilities – and that they are no different from everyone else. They all want – and are entitled to – a life, just like you or me.”

OMRDD is also celebrating its own “history” – its 30th anniversary – this year. OMRDD began operations in April 1978, and quickly moved to restructure its programs and services from an institutionally-based to a community-based service system. The agency was given the responsibility for the prevention and early detection of mental retardation and developmental disabilities and for comprehensively planned care and treatment of persons with developmental disabilities.

“Since the 1990s, the agency has increased its development of programs to address the needs of families caring for their family member with developmental disabilities at home, and has fostered the development of a strong self-advocacy system so that people with developmental disabilities can truly live richer lives,” said Ritter.

Educational Programs available through OMRDD

- **OMARDI: Teaching tolerance and acceptance through fun, laughter and open discussion.** OMARDI is a dynamic marionette that teaches children ages 3 to 6 about peers with developmental disabilities and that it’s OK to be different. OMARDI introduces social skills that will help kids foster friendships and peer support through understanding and dialogue. OMARDI is offered free to preschools, day care centers, pre-K, kindergarten classes, community groups, libraries and camps. Trained educators work with the marionette and address probing questions openly and with sensitivity.

- **Mainstreet: Raising Awareness of developmental disabilities – for middle and high school students.** Mainstreet is an interactive program that uses theater, simulation activities and discussion to expand awareness



and understanding of developmental disabilities. Mainstreet can be customized to fit the level of needs, interests and issues of any student groups. Classroom teachers can help select the topics and exercises appropriate for their students.

● **The Kids Project: Raising awareness of developmental disabilities – for grades two through five.** The Kids Project features life-like puppets who engage eight and nine-year-olds by telling their “stories.” The program is designed to help children feel comfortable interacting with kids with developmental disabilities; at the same time, it teaches students that children with developmental disabilities are just like them: playing games, having dreams and inspirations and living full lives. The program can include information about autism, cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness, epilepsy, learning disabilities and mental retardation.

● **Making Friends: Raising Awareness of developmental disabilities – for preschool and primary-grade children.** Making Friends is geared toward four-to-seven-year-old children. Educators use stories and dolls, each with a different disability, to teach children what it is like to live with a disability. Through storytelling and multi-sensory activities, educators also explore what it might be like to be developmentally disabled. Making Friends is available to preschools, kindergarten through second-grade classrooms, day care centers, community groups, libraries and camps.

For information about any of these programs or to schedule a presentation, contact the OMRDD Public Education Program at (518) 473-1190 or the regional Public Education Team at your local Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO). DDSO information can be found at www.omr.state.ny.us.

● **The Museum of disABILITY History, Buffalo, N.Y.**

The Museum of disABILITY History provides educational resources to teachers and encourages schools to present lessons to their students regarding this subject.

“It is important that our youth understand disability history in order to better understand how individuals with disabilities were once viewed and treated,” said Theresa Fraser, Museum Director.

In conjunction with Disability History Month, the museum has created a school curriculum focused on disability history. The project was funded in 2007 by a grant from the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation, and by People, Inc., and the Museum of disABILITY History. The curriculum was developed for grades 4-5 and 6-8. It is based on the “Kids Vote” format and is tied directly to the virtual exhibits found on the Museum’s Web site. The “Disability History” curriculum includes lesson plans and activities that are tied to New York State Learning Standards. For more information about the project, go to the Web site, www.museumofdisability.org or call 716-817-7261.

For more information about developmental disabilities or Disability History Month visit OMRDD’s Web site at www.omr.state.ny.us or www.museumofdisability.org; or call the OMRDD Office of Public Information at 518-474-6601.



About OMRDD

The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) provides high-quality services, supports and advocacy to approximately 120,000 individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. OMRDD works with a network of nearly 800 not-for-profit providers to help people with developmental disabilities lead richer lives that include meaningful relationships, good health, personal growth and productivity and homes in their communities.

About the Museum of disABILITY History

The Museum of disABILITY History is dedicated to the collection, preservation and display of artifacts pertaining to the history of people with disabilities. Located in Buffalo, N.Y., the Museum offers educational exhibits and activities that expand community awareness. The Museum of disABILITY History is now open to the public. To schedule a tour please contact Douglas A. Platt @ (716) 817-7477. The Museum of disABILITY History is a project of [People Inc.](#) For more information on the Museum of disABILITY History and its programs, contact: Marlena Gernett, Museum of disABILITY History, (716)817-7429 or mgernett@people-inc.org

-30-