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PHILADELPHIA'S CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING



**A Newsletter Advocating and Promoting Independent Living for Persons with Disabilities**

## Liberty & ADAPT Fight SSI Cuts in Harrisburg

*by Emily Coder*

Over 300 people from Liberty Resources travelled to Harrisburg by bus, car, and train on Tuesday, March 16th. There, we joined 58 other organizations to show our support for restoring the full State Supplemental Payment (SSP) to the 345,000 disabled, low-income, and elderly Pennsylvanians who have been harshly affected by the recent cuts.

Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens, including those with disabilities, those living on low-incomes, and the elderly, have been severely affected by the cuts to SSP, which aim to reduce the state budget deficit. The \$5 per month (\$10 per couple) cut is a reduction of 19%—an amount that people already below the poverty line cannot afford to lose.

"The action of the state of Pennsylvania is neither responsible nor in the interest of the common good," said Sister Mary Scullion of Project H.O.M.E., standing beneath the Capital Rotunda. "These cuts are a betrayal of the common good. We cannot pass on the fiscal



**ADAPT and Liberty advocates, including LRI staff and Consumers, gather inside the Capital Building in Harrisburg to protest the state's SSP cuts.**

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debt to the elderly, the poor and the disabled. We cannot accept that just because a man or a woman has a mental health disability or a physical disability that he or she should be denied economic opportunity.”

ADAPT’s Kathy Curcio shared her personal story. Then Jim Antonacci, President of the National Federation of the Blind of PA, led supporters in a chant directed at the Governor and General Assembly, “stop talking and start listening.”

Many of us met with state representatives, including William Adolf, Jr. of Delaware County, to share personal stories and to urge the state not to forget us. “We showed Harrisburg, 300 strong, that we will fight to restore the cuts to SSI,” said Nancy Salandra, LRI’s Director of Independent Living Services. But they have not listened...yet.

Unfortunately, on March 23rd, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives approved the Governor’s Budget Bill (HB 2297), which still includes the \$22 million SSP cut. This means that the 345,000 elderly, severely disabled, and blind Pennsylvanians who have been affected by the cut this year, will have to go through another year of tremendous financial problems.

As a follow up to the action, LRI bombarded Pennsylvania’s legislators by postcard on March 30th, and by email and fax, on April 1st. You can help by contacting your State Senator and Representative. Find your Zip Code+4 at <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp>. Then go to <http://www.aicup.org/GovernmentRelations/FindYourPALegislator/tabid/194/Default.aspx> and type in your full Zip Code in the “Find Members By” box near the top right of your screen. Finally, call, email, and fax your legislators! ★



# PDA Programs for Senior Consumers – What Are They All About?

*by Diane Babikian*

First let's test your acronym skills!

## **PCA?**

Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

## **PDA?**

Pennsylvania Department of Aging

## **PAS?**

Personal Assistance Services

In 2007, Liberty Resources began a partnership with the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging to provide Personal Assistance Services to seniors enrolling within home-based programs. Liberty's contract with PCA gave Philadelphia-based seniors with disabilities another option when choosing a PAS Provider. If you don't already know who they are, PCA is a private, non-profit organization whose mission adheres to five major functions: planning, advocacy, program development, service coordination and delivery, and the administration of public and private funds. They contract with over 100 community organizations to deliver social and health care services to thousands of Consumers each year.

Although 2007 and 2008 were slow growth years for building the Aging program, Liberty has seen a spike in referrals since mid-2009 and into

2010. Currently, over 130 Philadelphia seniors actively receive PAS through Liberty Resources, thanks in no small amount to the efforts of Liberty's dedicated team.

Michelle Amato was the initial Supports Coordinator dedicated to our PDA Consumers at the start in 2007. She continues to be a great asset to LRI, working with PDA Consumers part time as a Supplemental Supports Coordinator. Alesha Bueno has been a Supports Coordinator for our PDA Consumers since April 2009. Liynaa Burrell has been a Supports Coordinator for this population since she started with Liberty in June 2009, and adds that she loves every minute of it! Both Alesha and Liynaa can oversee up to 75 PDA Consumers at any given time.

Since 2007, Melissa Powell has also been a key figure in the oversight of PDA referrals and the supports coordination team, as well as a liaison with multiple Aging Provider contacts. Additionally, Sheryl Raiss—one of Liberty's Medical Support Specialist Nurses—has consistently offered support to the team and continues to ensure that certain PDA Consumers receive a required quarterly nursing visit.

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You may wonder, what's the difference between the PDA programs and Consumers served, as compared to "Under 60" in-home programs and Consumers served? One obvious difference is the age range of Consumers. Currently, the average age of PDA Consumers is 70.5 years old. Michelle's oldest Consumer is 79 years old. Liynaa currently works with a 94 year-old Consumer, and Alesha's two oldest Consumers are 97 and 98! Michelle has been given some advice from her older Consumers: "I've had multiple Consumers tell me to appreciate my body now, because it won't always be as faithful to me," she said.

The Coordinators really enjoy talking to and learning from their senior Consumers and are amazed by what some of the Consumers have seen and done. One of Alesha's Consumers, now 70, is proud to discuss the fact that he self-published a book on sports writing when he was about 60 years old. Liynaa enjoyed talking at length with one of her Consumers who has a collection of different artifacts, paintings, and antiques that she collected throughout her entire life—each one symbolizing a certain perspective of each of her life experiences.

Programmatically speaking, there are a few major differences between the "Under 60" services and those for seniors. First, PDA Consumers are assessed and enrolled for services through PCA. Second, PCA creates

and maintains the Consumer's service plan. After the Consumer chooses LRI or another in-home care Provider for PAS, the referral is made. The Supports Coordinators will make an initial home visit to meet the Consumer, explain services, and complete any necessary paperwork. We are then responsible to set up the PAS within a two week time frame.

Consumers may enroll in one of two programs offered. The individual may be eligible for services at no cost through the Pennsylvania Department of Aging's "Waiver" Program or through Philadelphia Corporation for Aging's "Options" Program. The Options Program provides service on a sliding fee scale, according to the Consumer's ability to pay.

Although PDA Consumers have the same choice as "Under 60" Consumers to receive their PAS via Consumer Model, Agency Model, or Combination Model, most of the Consumers utilize Consumer Model of Service. Another difference is in the amount of PAS hours—most PDA Consumers average between one and four hours of PAS per day. However, these Consumers are also eligible to receive additional supports and services provided to seniors through PCA.

Additional supports and services may include home-delivered meals, additional home support services, nursing care, companionship services, physical and occupational therapy, home modifications, transportation

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# Celebrating the Life of **Buddy Homiller**

*On February 23, 2010, the Liberty family lost another of its most passionate, dedicated, and recognizable advocates. Buddy Homiller was a long-standing LRI Board Member and a DIA member for a quarter century. Armed with his air horn, Buddy remained ready to take up the mantle and advocate for Independent Living whenever the occasion arose.*

Charles Pierre "Buddy" Homiller Jr. of Philadelphia died at the age of 80. He was born on November 12, 1929 to the late Charles Homiller Sr. and Sarah Homiller.

He was the beloved husband of the late Ruth Homiller.

One of Liberty Resources' oldest Consumers, Buddy remained an active Board member until his hospitalization in December of 2009. Buddy's unmistakable passion for independent living showed in his strength and dedication as one of LRI's most vocal advocates.

Buddy was a member of DIA for 25 years, and an activist with ADAPT for the last 22 years.

Buddy was also a member of Wyoming Avenue Baptist Church for 40 years, and then joined the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.



"When I first met Buddy in 1997, I had been working at Liberty Resources for about 3 weeks. He stopped at my desk and introduced himself and told me his attendant would also be coming in. He said that I would recognize his attendant because he was 'The Big Guy'. Buddy always made a special effort to stop and see me each time he visited Liberty Resources. He was instrumental in helping me to understand the importance of listening to others and advocating for yourself and others on

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# LRI Academy Receives Funding Boost from Senator Arlen Specter and the Department of Labor

*by Dan Muroff*

United States Senator Arlen Specter recently provided \$100,000 in federal funding to Liberty Resources for the Academy, a program that trains disabled persons to enter or re-enter the workforce.

The Department of Labor funds that Senator Specter provided through the Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriations process will be used primarily to aid returning, disabled veterans.

The program trains thirty persons with disabilities every year, building the regional workforce and providing the program's graduates with newly gained independence. A key aspect of the program is the individualized assessment each student receives to equip them with the assistive technology they need to learn and to succeed in the workplace.

"Senator Specter's support of our Academy program and other initiatives for people with disabilities such as his sponsorship of the Community Choice Act are indicative of his leadership in the Independent Living movement." remarked LRI CEO, Thomas Earle.



**Senator Specter defending the Community Choice Act—legislation he has long championed—in Washington, D.C. last year.**

# Liberty Wheels: A Success Story

by Shawn Tucker

I won't name names, but I got my wheelchair somewhere else in 2005. At first, I was excited about my new chair, mainly because it has detachable sides so I can change the color between red, blue, black, and champagne. But after a few months a rubber piece on the hand controller came off, exposing the wires. This was more of a problem than anything since things kept getting in, causing the chair to short out. I had to pay out of pocket for a new controller and when I asked for a new style, they said that it wasn't possible.

For one reason or another, the chair would stop working and, of course, always at the worst times. For instance, my chair once stopped working in the middle of the street at 9th & Arch! It was a nightmare, but thankfully people were friendly and the traffic wasn't heavy.

I kept calling my insurance company about my chair short-circuiting, but they wouldn't do more than send someone over to look at it for a few minutes.

Honestly, they were using duct-tape and bungee cords to fix my chair and kept trying to reassure me that it "should be taken care of this time". But it kept shutting off randomly and at the worst times.

Finally, I went down to Liberty Wheels right after it opened to check it out and see if there was anything that they could do for me. Rich, the technician, took one look at my chair and realized that there was a wire that needed to be replaced. In a matter of minutes they fixed my chair!

Liberty Wheels is convenient, reliable, and friendly. Ray, Kim, and Rich are all great and I plan to use Liberty Wheels, right downstairs, to order my next chair. Everyone should try them—I guarantee that you'll be pleasantly surprised!

Visit [www.libertywheels.net](http://www.libertywheels.net) for additional information and to see an updated list of providers that they accept.



**LibertyWheels**  
Mobility for **Everyone**

**877-7-LWHEELS**

[www.libertywheels.net](http://www.libertywheels.net)



## Buddy Homiller *continued from page 5*

a daily basis. He will be missed but never forgotten as we continue his lifelong mission of making our world a more accessible place for everyone. A job well done my good and faithful advocate. Rest in Peace my friend.”

—Ann Kleinschmidt

“I think Buddy will be remembered as our longest and best activist in Philly. He recognized injustice, fought back, and taught others through his experiences. He was a wonderful role model who will never be forgotten!”

—Cassie James Holdsworth

“For me the fondest memory in the brief time I knew Buddy is the first time I heard his horn. I thought that a car had made its way into the main lobby somehow!”

—Jon Maratea

“Buddy had a way of making you laugh. My favorite memory, as his Supports Coordinator for so long, was translating for him. Because I worked with Buddy so much, I was able to understand him and he would use me like an interpreter with other staff or with outside communications. We worked well together and I would repeat what he was saying. If I misinterpreted at first, he had the cutest laugh until I got it right and a nice smile when I was on the button.”

—Mary Beth Morgan

“Buddy was one of my favorite people I got to know while working at LRI. I loved his laugh and his determination. Buddy and I always had fun communicating with each other; my hearing and his voice were a perfect match. We would laugh and struggle to understand what was on his mind. But somehow in the end I understood what he wanted. Buddy will always be my inspiration.”

—Bruce Connus

“As a Supports Coordinator, Buddy taught me how to be a better listener and that being a good listener is at times all that somebody needs.”

—Kazina S. Plummer

“We were at a city budget hearing and at that time we were working on the Housing Trust Fund issues with the Philadelphia Affordable Housing Coalition. So we were making our presence known and they would not let more people in the hearing and closed the doors. We had Buddy blowing his horn until they opened the doors and left the doors open so all could hear. That day was a major turning point towards making the Housing Trust Fund a reality. Also, that day Councilman Nutter gave \$10 Million dollars to the Adaptive Modification and Basic Systems Repair programs that was left from the NHT program. Thank God for Buddy and his horn!”

—Nancy Salandra

## PDA Services *continued from page 4*

to healthcare providers, and adult day services. PCA also provides information to seniors regarding emergency and government services, healthcare and medical services, housing options, utilities assistance, advocacy, counseling, and lifestyle support services.

PDA Consumers may participate in Liberty's skills training courses through the ILS department, in addition to accessing our other CIL core services, such as Peer Support, Advocacy, Skills Training, or Intake and Referral.

Attendants for PDA Consumers are able to participate in PCA's Direct Care Worker Initiative trainings offered externally through the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Nursing Consultation Service. For example, this year's trainings will focus on infection control and influenza, oral hygiene, dementia and behavior, falls and medications, and continence. These attendants receive training certificates and can also be eligible for additional incentives, such as pay increases.

When asked what helpful advice or insight they would give to other staff working with older Consumers, Michelle said, "I would say to have patience and to go into each Consumer's home ready to listen. I think that the older Consumers I've worked with really get joy out of sharing their younger lives with you, even while they're yelling at you about all the paperwork that they have to sign!"

Alesha had similar sentiments, stating, "Be patient, understanding of individual circumstances; be a good listener and you will learn a great deal."

Liyana feels that patience is the key to working with the elderly; being honest, compassionate, and having a good insight on their feelings. She also feels it is crucial for any Supports Coordinator to always value the mission statement, what we provide to our Consumers, and what LRI stands for. "If you have a good heart, working with something that you like, then go for it and give it your all," she says.

Within the greater Philadelphia area, the population of aging adults with disabilities continues to grow. As Liberty also continues its growth, we are thankful for our partnership with PCA and will continue to strive to meet the needs of our senior Consumers with compassion, conscience, and quality, pursuant to the Independent Living philosophy.

Per Michelle, "I think that working with the PDA programs is the best gig in HCBS!"

*To get more information about the PDA Program or additional services available for seniors, log into [www.PCAcares.org](http://www.PCAcares.org) or contact the PCA Helpline at 214-765-9040. ★*

# An Interview with Tom Earle and Zach Lewis

by Annette Hall, Academy Student

My name is Annette Hall and I am a student at Liberty Resources Academy. I am taking a course named Assistive Technology. Mr. Chris Hyson is my instructor. As a bonus question on my first quiz for the class, I was asked to interview any available Liberty staff member and ask them how they got their start at Liberty Resources. Moreover, I was asked to use my *LiveScribe Pulse Pen*, which records my written notes. I had the honor of having two impromptu interviews. The first was with Mr. Zach Lewis, an Independent Living Specialist, and the second was with Mr. Thomas Earle, the Chief Executive Officer of Liberty Resources, Inc.

As an Independent Living Specialist, Mr. Lewis aids Consumers who desire to live on their own and are able to direct their own care in living independently. Skills training and peer support, along with teaching Consumers how to manage their attendants, are just a few of the many things he does. He also gives the "411" on what services are available by providing information and referral to Consumers. Yet, his passion and the areas in which he aspires to be most proficient and thorough are advocacy and activism. He enjoys working with ADAPT and wants to be a resource to anyone who needs his help.

My second interview was with Mr. Thomas Earle, the Chief Executive



Officer of Liberty Resources, Inc. After peeking into his open door, I requested a few minutes of his time. He welcomed me into his office. He shared a little about his past and some of his current and future aspirations of service to this organization.

Mr. Earle graduated from Rutgers University Law School in May of 1991. Thereafter, he worked in the federal courts pursuing civil rights cases for adults and children with physical and intellectual disabilities. While at school and work, Mr. Earle said, adequate accommodations were made to assist him. Although all of his cases were rewarding, he felt especially rewarded by those which addressed the rights of persons with visual impairment or blindness. For example, he referenced a case against the City of Philadelphia which required voting machines with audible output to be provided for blind voters, who

could then hear verbal annunciation of candidates on the ballots. He also cited a 1999 case against Mellon Bank which required audible instructions to be provided via headphone jacks for new ATM machines.

Since January of 2003, Mr. Earle has been the CEO of Liberty Resources, Inc. He has and will remain committed to advancing independent living for people with disabilities. Currently, LRI is one of the biggest of over 400 independent living centers in the country.

Listening to the needs of the Consumer is what makes LRI the best at what it does. For instance, Liberty Wheels was

birthed out of the Consumer's need for a dependable durable medical equipment provider. LRI is steadfast in its commitment to transitioning people with disabilities out of Nursing Homes or other institutional settings, and moving them into the community with the support that they need. Liberty Housing Development Corporation, which currently has 29 accessible bedroom units, is just one means of addressing these concerns.

I am so grateful to the Lord for people like Mr. Zachary Lewis and Mr. Thomas Earle who do not only see, hear, and understand our concerns, but are active, assertive advocates on our behalf. Thank you. ★

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