

January 11, 2022

A Note on the Past and a Letter to the Future

We hope those who uncover this letter, and your families, are well.

The last two years have been unprecedented for us – living through a global pandemic and changing the way we work, deliver services, communicate with each other and prioritize our lives. It has been a challenge that we have met head on as an agency, while keeping our staff, our families and ourselves safe. Despite the pandemic, our work forged forward.

Family is the cornerstone of everything we do at ICAN – it is the essence of all of our programs and services. Our agency itself is a family. The 185 staff, the 200 subcontracted service providers, the seven board members; that is our ICAN family. While as an agency we have invested in bricks and mortar assets over the past few years our single greatest asset is our people. We too have invested in them, in their own families, and in turn our community. We believe whole heartedly that if our staff are empowered and able to prioritize their own families, they will then be able to provide the best possible care to those we serve. This is built on the simple premise—***strong families help build strong communities.***

Family is the reason we have chosen this very building to create a Family Resource Center and a new, state-of-the-art children’s museum. A hub for learning, wellness, connectedness and FUN, this will be the first time that a children’s museum is co-located and partnered with a human services non-profit.

We are making history.

This promises to be a destination where all families can meet, interact, and spend time together—those with the highest need, and those just in need of quality time. Generations to come will benefit long into the future because of this transformational project. We hope that you, at whatever time you are reading this, can look back fondly at memories you and your families have made here together in the same way we have. These memories for us come not only from the 25 years of ICAN’s existence, but also the nearly 60 years of rich history from the children’s museum.

How did this project come about? Why ICAN? Allow me to share our history.

Founded in 1997, ICAN is a unique home and community-based network that provides individualized and non-traditional services and care to the highest risk individuals and families with social, emotional, mental health and behavioral challenges. ICAN’s team of over 180 staff consisting of care managers, service coordinators, social workers, support specialists, clinical staff and an extensive Independent Practice Association (IPA) of 200+ providers, work together to provide a platform for support, family reunification and preservation to nearly 2,000 individuals and families each day—prenatally through end of life.

For an agency that started with one program, a few staff and one location, where we are almost 25 years later is astounding and we are proud of our growth and the culture we have built that makes us a trusted agency for clients and partners AND a sought after place to work.

History of ICAN:

- 1997** • Intensive Kids Oneida – original flagship initiative launched
- 2000** • Parent Partners started to provide peer support to empower families to overcome barriers
- 2005** • Fee for Service (later renamed SPIN) created to provide services ala carte
- 2008** • Branched out to a new county with the creation of Kids Herkimer
- 2013** • Family Nurturing Center joined Kids Oneida bringing Healthy Families Herkimer and Oneida Counties, Evelyn’s House and Nurturing Parenting Programs
- 2014** • Kids Mohawk Valley provided increased access to other counties
- 2016** • Established the Adult Services Division
- 2017** • Children’s Health Homes program joined us and we entered into a managed services contract with the Utica Children’s Museum, which was located at the time right across the street from our headquarters on Main Street in Utica
- 2019** • Opened Project HOME rapid rehousing program, launched Kids Otsego to provide preventive services, Kids Oneida rebrands to Integrated Community Alternatives Network (ICAN)
- 2020** • ICAN announces on March 4 that we will be opening a new Family Resource Center and a state-of-the-art Children’s Museum. On March 13, the Covid-19 pandemic hits and the world shuts down. Close to 180 staff members transitioned to work from home and provide remote services to our clients. We are deemed essential as a provider of critical mental health services. (See our enclosed 2020 Annual Report to see how we came together for ourselves and our clients.)
- 2021** • Our Social Emotional Hub in Herkimer opens, we return to work in-person, we break ground on the Family Resource Center, launch our “Together We Can” Capital Campaign and the Children’s Museum launches their Mobile Museum.

The new museum will provide a space and be a catalyst for post-pandemic healing for all and will offer needed socialization, connection and joy as well as hands-on educational experiences aligned with school curricula to help students get back on track after an extended loss of learning. Close to the Parkway Recreational Center, Val Bialas Ski Center, Utica Zoo and the John S. Dyson New York Energy Zone, the museum will enhance this family-friendly district of the city.

Regional and national experts are assisting with the project from architecture and conceptualization to creation of museum exhibits and ensuring Universal Design principles are integrated. This is a place that welcomes everyone—every background, ability, challenge, social-economic status and geographic region.

I am very proud of the work that our ICAN family provides to clients every day. I am thankful for the vision of our board of directors and leadership team, and we have welcomed the very best consultants and partners onto our team who are making this project a reality.

We hope that children and families for many generations make memories together here in this building, that bonds form and healing happens. We want to see mental health destigmatized and prioritized just as physical health is, leading to a healthier, more supportive community. We are looking forward to the love for learning and creativity that will start here, for cultural competence to begin and for an appreciation of the region we live in to be sparked within these walls.

And lastly, we hope that PLAY always remains an imperative part of thriving childhoods and that adults remember that “being a kid again” is essential to their well-being as well.

We wish you health and happiness. Remember the laughter and love that has echoed through this space and build on that as you bring this building into its next chapter.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Bulger', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

Steven Bulger
CEO/Executive Director