

THE NEW PIONEERS

The story of Cantalician Center for Learning parallels the arc of progress and integration for individuals with developmental disabilities – but Cantalician has always been ahead of the curve.

Perhaps this was only natural. One might expect women who rejected the isolation of a cloister to advocate for community integration. But still, the faith the Felician Sisters placed in their students was exceptional – to expect progress when everyone else expects failure is radical and heroic. This generous and courageous spirit inspired Cantalician Center through decades of daring work and still lies at the heart of its efforts today.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Cantalician faced its greatest challenge. Leadership changes in Federal and State administrations led to huge budget cuts and great hardship for every agency that used government sources to fund their programming.

Fortunately, a forward-thinking leadership team, a talented staff, a dedicated board, resilient students and adults, devoted parents, generous donors and businesses, committed volunteers, and a compassionate community were able to come together to keep serving as many people as possible – a validating demonstration of the power and importance of community integration.

As always, the expectation – and the result – has been progress. With an exceptional staff and modern facilities, Cantalician Center is still ahead of the curve. Students of all ages are thriving in individualized programs at a new Early Childhood Center and Academic Campus in Depew, New York, and the workshop, now called Diversified Labor Solutions, is home base for hundreds of employees who have been able to integrate into a variety of community-based workplaces.

Like the Felician Sisters who braved the Atlantic to pioneer a new community in a new world, today's Cantalician pioneers are finding new ways to teach and work and serve their community with a "heroic love" of neighbor and a devotion to the individuals and families who need them most.



The 1990s brought tectonic policy changes in the way the State took care of people with developmental disabilities. While most changes were good, like phasing out institutions, they put pressure on agencies to accommodate a much broader community integration plan. Always anticipating the greatest need, Sister Raphael Marie launched a new Group Home program in 1990. For nearly fifteen years, Cantalician Center managed seven homes for dozens of adults and seniors, extending care to yet another community in need.



Policy changes also came to Cantalician Community and Day Services. It transitioned from a sheltered workshop to an integrated business model and began offering day habilitation options in the community plus a host of employment services, including vocational evaluations, job placement, and follow-along job coaches. Now, Cantalician's partnership with Diversified Labor Solutions has become a model program for how to help adults with disabilities find success at work.

*"Cantalician Center is not a name;
it is an expression of love
for one another."*

— Sister Raphael Marie



Cantalician Center continues to do what it has always done so well: take care of individuals with disabilities. Its innovative Early Childhood Community Services program ensures that infants and toddlers get a good start in their most formative years, and the Integrated Preschool program continually places 93% of its students back into their home school district for kindergarten. As they've done since 1956, school children and their parents still look to Cantalician Center as a source of help and a ray of hope.

