



Expert Insights From

Robert S. Budd, Senior CEO/President of Family Residences and Essential Enterprises **A Call for Partnership, Solutions, and Advocacy**

Sometimes serendipity results in great things happening. Robert S. Budd, Senior CEO and President of Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, came to the organization because he needed a job and a friend told him they had openings. “The opportunity matched my skills, and I thought I would help out for a bit part-time,” he recalled. He eventually went full-time, using his skills as a case manager and behavior specialist. Then a mentor suggested he would have greater impact as an administrator. The rest, as the expression goes, is history. “It was one of those ‘meant to be’ scenarios,” Budd said.

Fueling Individuals’ Accomplishments and Success

Budd is proud of his organization’s many accomplishments and innovative services. “When we really listen and honor people’s insights and gifts, that is when the magic happens,” he said. This, for example, is what led to the establishment of the FREE Players Drum & Bugle Corps, the first totally differently-abled competing marching band in the nation.

“This came about because we listened to people who were interested in music or theater,” he said. Established in 2010, the Drum & Bugle Corps provides new opportunities to people of all abilities all across Long Island, New York, who are aspiring musicians, dancers, actors, and athletes. It was developed to help participants achieve their goals and dreams through music education, dance/color guard equipment instruction, and inclusive community-based performance and travel opportunities. “This is an example of the things that can be accomplished when we believe in people and their ability to be successful,” said Budd.

Driving Community Partnerships

Budd is tirelessly committed to enabling the I/DD field to be seen and understood as a great community partner, rather than as a “charity.” He said, “We are

passionate about finding opportunities for inclusion and integration,” where I/DD is part of social partnerships for true social benefit.

“When people segregate us and disconnect us from the larger community good, we can become isolative and true integration becomes a challenge,” said Budd, adding, “To continue within this highly regulated environment to find opportunities for natural connections with local business, educational institutions, places of worship, and community groups is where true synergies need to take place.” This is where, he said, there is a true “win-win.”

I/DD providers need to take the lead. He said, “The more we create our own solutions and are seen as part of a larger social context, the more we are seen as having value.” This requires some extra attention and focus, he suggested, as “there are so many competing priorities and so much divisiveness.” Leaders in the field need to be good role models, he said, “always learning and growing and working on ourselves.” This also involves walking the walk and talking the talk in ways that constantly remind team members of the organization’s core mission and values. It also is important to “create safe, trusting environments so people feel safe to express themselves and are drawn to the synergy.”

Opportunities, and Challenges Ahead

While there are opportunities for the future, Budd noted that there are challenges to address. One of these involves staffing shortages and the need to attract and keep talented, passionate people to the field. “I think we have work to do on the state and federal levels to make sure we have policies and regulations that focus on

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Expert Insights From **Robert S. Budd, Continued**

innovation and make jobs more interesting and vibrant," he said. This includes advocating for a professional wage. Budd said, "These are professionals, and if you line up roles across the board, we are all here for a primary mission, which includes protecting people's rights and their ability to pursue their passions."

Budd suggested the need for a multi-pronged approach to advocating for funding "in a manner that says we are part of the solution and not a charity." Leaders in the industry need to build on the recognition the I/DD sector has received in recent years. Budd said, "The silver

lining of the pandemic was that out of necessity, people needed to pay attention to us and suddenly understood our value as partners. People better understand what we do and that we contribute to solutions. We are fighting to keep that momentum."

A realist but also optimist at heart, Budd urges others, "Always lead with hope. Always believe that dreams are possible. Realize that the only constant is change and that we want and need to be key influencers to ensure that change is positive."