A DANCE TRouPE FOR ALL

Paraprofessional Joanne Newton of PS 80 in Jamaica, Queens poses with members of the school dance troupe, L2L (Learn2Lead), that she has built and nurtured by giving up her lunch hour for 13 years. When Newton began working at PS 80, special education students were not included in the school’s performances. She began organizing dance performances for them, and soon other students wanted to join. The troupe is now open to all students. “You don’t know who’s special ed and who’s regular ed, and that’s how I wanted it to be,” Newton said. Her reward is to see her students’ self-esteem and confidence grow through the hard work and satisfaction of learning, practicing, traveling and performing.

CALL YOUR BOROUGH OFFICE

I just want to remind you that if you run into any issues or have any questions, you should call your borough office and speak to the paraprofessional borough coordinator there.

BRONX SHARON ANDERSON 718-379-6200 • 2500 Halsey Street

BROOKLYN SHIRLEY LANEY 718-852-4500 • 335 Adams St., 25th Fl.

MANHATTAN IRMA RODRIGUEZ 212-598-6800 • 52 Broadway, 10th Fl.

QUEENS PENNY SEROUTE 718-275-4400 • 97-77 Queens Blvd., 5th Fl. Rego Park, NY

STATEN ISLAND SANDRA FLECHA 718-605-1400 • 4456 Amboy Road

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Shelvy Young-Abrams

Did you know that paraprofessionals are the fastest-growing chapter in the UFT?

Two years ago we had 19,841 paraprofessionals. This year we are up to 24,835, or nearly 25,000.

Our ranks are growing in New York City schools because of the importance of your role in helping to make sure that all students have their needs met. As our numbers grow, it's important to reflect on how crucial our union is to us personally and to our profession. I often say to our new paraprofessional UFT members that our little yellow union cards mean a lot. It is because of our union that we have a voice in our workplace to help ensure that our schools and students get the resources they need.

But unions are under attack here in New York State and across the country. Each of us needs to do our part to keep our union strong by staying active, such as by attending chapter meetings, volunteering for political activities and joining union events.

Thank you for all that you do.

Shelvy Young-Abrams
Paraprofessionals Chapter Chairperson

Dear Colleagues,

I want to thank you for all your hard work this year in our campaign to protect public schools against Gov. Cuomo’s attacks. Your support and participation in events, such as the day we joined hands around our schools, has already made a big difference. Because of our campaign, a majority of the people in New York State disapprove of the governor’s handling of public education.

We need your help still. Cuomo and the Wall Street financiers who want to privatize public education are now pushing for an education tax credit bill that is a thinly veiled voucher program, which would funnel tens of millions of dollars toward private school donors. They also want to greatly increase the number of charter schools in New York City as another way of starving our public school system of needed funding, building space and support.

Please sign up for our campaign to keep public education public. Go to the Action Alerts box on our home page at uft.org or go to uft.org/keep-public-ed-public.

Your activism in our union is critical to keep the UFT strong. And, your work in our schools enhances the education of New York City students every day.

Thank you for everything that you do.

Sincerely,

Shelvy Young-Abrams
Paraprofessionals Chapter Chairperson

Michael Mulgrew, President
Parafest luncheon

Our 54th annual Paraprofessional Festival and Luncheon on March 4 drew over 1,000 members of our chapter for a wonderful day of professional development and celebrating our chapter’s achievements.

Workshops were offered in conflict management, autism and understanding the Individualized Education Program, among other topics. In addition to the trainings focused on working with special education students, President Michael Mulgrew and Schools Chancellor Carmen Farina both came and spoke.

Several members of our chapter were honored with Paraprofessionals of the Year Awards: Digna Soto, Daniela Santiago, Nia Hagwood, Fabiana Mattiello, Marie Fechles, Karen O'Connor, Samuel Dejesus Jr., Teofilo Torres, Michele Oetting, Herminia Botta, Migda Rodriguez, Raul Michael Del Hoyo, Teofilo Torres, Michele Oetting, Raúl Michael De Hoy, Michelle Griffin and Xiaomari M. Lara.

In addition, Hector Ruiz Jr., the second vice chairman of our chapter, was honored with the first Maria Portalatin Award, named for a founder and former chairperson of our chapter. Laura Tambuno, the UFT’s liaison for salary issues with the Department of Education, received the Chairperson’s Award for her outstanding support of our chapter.

Congratulations to all honorees, and thank you to those of you who joined us for this wonderful event!

Are you a Level III teaching assistant?

More than 250 paraprofessionals who have to provide proof of completion of 75 hours of professional development by the end of June received notification and a tracking form from the Department of Education. These are paraprofessionals who received their Level III Teaching Assistant certificates from the state on Sept. 1, 2009, or Feb. 1, 2010, and will reach the first five-year professional development cycle of 75 hours on June 30. They should follow the directions in the letter and submit the tracking form by June 15. For more information, call your UFT borough office or go to uft.org/our-chapters/paraprofessionals/certification.

As you may have heard, the state is planning future changes to professional development requirements for paraprofessionals with Level III Teaching Assistant certificates. But those certification changes will not take effect until September 2016 at the earliest. We will let you know as soon as we have more information. Please keep an eye out for any announcements about this on our chapter website at www.uft.org/our-chapters/paraprofessionals/certification.

All Level III teaching assistants must complete 75 hours of professional development every five years. This maintains the validity of your Level III teaching assistant certificate and allows you to continue to work. You should seek approval from your principal for any professional development that you wish to apply toward your professional development requirements, although it is important to know all the professional development opportunities provided by our contract will count towards the requirement.

Go to the paraprofessionals chapter page of uft.org or the State Education Department’s website at big.ened.ny.gov/ert/retreat/ Bert/7/5.html.

Now that each school has elected its paraprofessional representative, here is a reminder of the responsibilities of that position. If you have any questions, please call your borough paraprofessional coordinator.

Meetings:

• Attend monthly citywide paraprofessional representative meetings at 52 Broadway.

• Hold paraprofessional meetings at your school in collaboration with your chapter’s leader.

• Attend district paraprofessional representative meetings.

• Attend district meetings for all paraprofessional members.

Participation:

• Attend UFT events and activities.

• Attend UFT rallies and demonstrations.

• Volunteer at phone banks and in other political action activities.

• Join other union activities as needed.

Teamwork:

• Work with your school’s chapter leader on issues pertaining to union and school life and act as a liaison between the chapter leader and the paraprofessionals in your school.

• Work with your district para coordinators.

• Work with your borough para coordinator.

• Support the leadership of the UFT paraprofessional chapter and inform them of any problems or issues within your school, district and borough.

Responsibilities of paraprofessional representatives

If you know of or are involved in a safety incident in your school, it’s important that you report it. Accurate reporting is the first step in creating a safe environment in every school.

When you become aware of a safety or discipline incident:

• First, inform your chapter leader.

• Tell your school administration within 24 hours.

• File a report with the DOE through the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) at your school.

• File a UFT incident report online or print and fax a paper copy of the form to 212-677-6712. Both these forms are accessible at uft.org/our-rights/incident-reporting.

For more information, call your borough office and ask to speak to a health and safety representative.

REPORTING SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE INCIDENTS

After you complete a UFT incident report, it will be reviewed along with the DOE incident summary and entered into the UFT school safety computer database. Then, a UFT staff member from your respective borough will call you, and the safety department will send you a letter informing you of your rights and available services.

VICTIM SUPPORT PROGRAM

After you file your report, you may be referred to the Victim Support Program. This program, jointly sponsored by the DOE and UFT, offers psychological counseling services, assistance with Workers’ Compensation and support in person at court and at the DOE medical bureau.

Her union activism doesn’t end with retirement

Former special representative Doreen Raftery still active in UFT

Even after retiring from her longtime position as a special representative to our chapter, Doreen Raftery’s strong ties to the UFT keep her active with the union.

Raftery, who retired June 30, 2014, is taking quilting and photography courses at the Queens borough office and is starting to become active with the retirees chapter.

“I can’t cut off cold turkey,” Raftery said of her union activities.

Raftery served as a special representative for our chapter for 18 years, starting in 1996. Highlights of her time with the chapter include working with the Department of Education and the UFT Teacher Center to provide workshops for parats to obtain their state certification. She is gratified that these workshops are still going strong.

She said she also loves to see other parats learn the importance of their union to their professional lives and the public schools. Attending the monthly meetings for paraprofessional representatives and volunteering for political action are important to building our ties with the UFT, she said.

“It’s our union,” she said. “We’re all one.”

Parascope