

# Think **DIFFERENTLY.**

“This is a call to action, a genuine challenge to determine if we have it within ourselves to see past our differences and treat others the way we would hope to be treated. Too often, many with special needs are overlooked and their unique abilities ignored. Instead, we seek to lift each other up and embrace all residents of all abilities.

‘Think Differently’ is a call to arms – a reminder of what we can achieve when we look past our differences, challenge ourselves and determine to let no obstacle stand in our way.”

- **Marcus J. Molinaro**, Dutchess County Executive

Dutchess will again partner to bring the successful Walkway Marathon and Expo back to the Hudson River Valley, this year featuring the inaugural “Think Differently Dash” – a one-mile run for those with special abilities. We are so proud to host this special event and encourage all to get involved either as a participant or as a supportive race buddy.



With the help of community partners, Dutchess County hosts a number of events for special needs individuals and their families.

## Community Events

Our special needs summer picnic and movie days are very popular events that provide families the opportunity to enjoy time with their loved ones in a supportive atmosphere. These events offer low sensory impact and stress-free fun in a welcoming environment.

This year, Dutchess County welcomed the Special Olympics New York State Winter Games. These games and the over 1,000 competitors from across the state inspired us, demonstrating how hard work and dedication helped them boldly overcome obstacles and achieve success. Our commitment to “ThinkDifferently” was on full display with record breaking numbers of volunteers and fans in the stands.

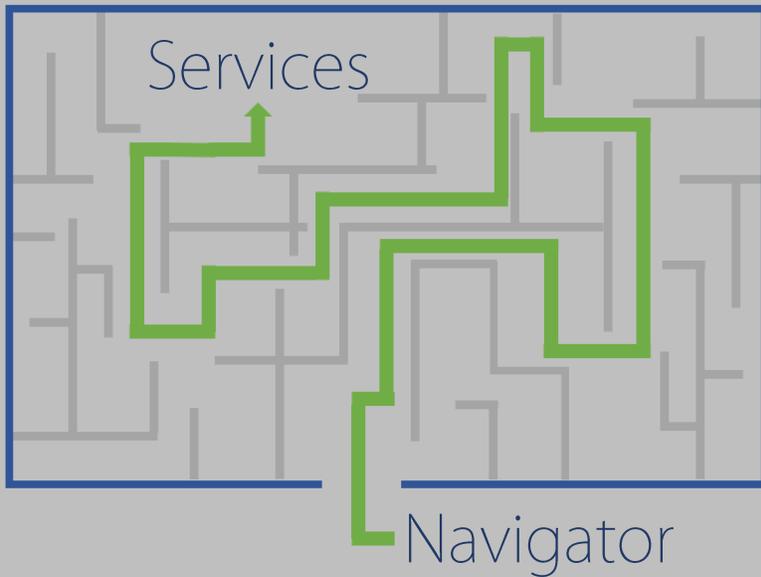


[DUTCHESSNY.GOV](http://DUTCHESSNY.GOV)



# Navigating the System

Too often families with special needs face a system that is complex and confusing and can face obstacles that seem insurmountable. And while many in county government and throughout a broad network of service providers try to assist – and do amazing work – we can do better. That’s why last year we appointed an advocate; our **Deputy Commissioner for Special Needs** which may be the only such position in the State. The responsibilities are broad and require just the right skills. But the goal is an important one: We boldly seek to change minds, open hearts and inspire a county to celebrate and support the unique abilities of every resident.



Dutchess County is striving to create infrastructure that is accessible to all. Many Community Development Block Grant applications and the projects awarded embrace that spirit and will improve access to facilities and resources that make Dutchess County a special place to live and raise a family.

Funded projects have included: Challenger Field, a field for developmentally or physically disabled children to play baseball, Julie’s Jungle, an adaptive playground for all ability levels, and other handicap accessibility projects.



The County is also revising the current Parks Master Plan, in an effort to more broadly incorporate handicap accessibility throughout our county parks.

Accessible **INFRASTRUCTURE**



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## Awards

With so many taking up our challenge, we honor the best efforts of community agencies, municipalities, businesses and individuals with our first-ever Think Differently Awards.

## **AUTISM** Supportive Environment

Through our Autism Supportive Environment Training, businesses are learning new ways to make facilities and services more accessible and training staff to welcome and support special needs customers and co-workers. The program includes on-site consultation, assessment and recommendations to help individuals with Autism and their families to enjoy local establishments.

Expanding on the success of the supportive environment training, Dutchess Tourism and the Anderson Center for Autism are working together to establish Dutchess County and its amazing sites and attractions as an “Autism Supportive Tourist Destination,” where special-needs families feel welcome and are encouraged to visit.

