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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## ***Autism Services Programs, Services To Transition to People Inc., The Summit Center Separate Agencies to Provide Programs Based on Specialties***

**WILLIAMSVILLE, NY** (Nov. 15, 2023) – Two local nonprofits that support people with developmental disabilities are working together to ensure the continuation of educational, residential, and other services currently provided by Autism Services, Inc.

Autism Services, Inc. supports 175 people in day programs, group homes and other programs funded and regulated by the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). It also operates two New York State Education Department-certified school age special education programs located in Buffalo and Amherst, serving approximately 100 students.

As a result of insurmountable financial challenges, beginning Feb. 1, 2024, Autism Services' OPWDD-funded programs will transfer to People Inc. The Summit Center will expand its school services on or about Feb. 1, 2024, providing school age educational programs to current students attending Autism Service's schools.

Autism Services faces significant operational and financial challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this year, Autism Services approached People Inc. seeking an affiliation to provide assistance with administrative, back-office, and managerial support. As part of its strategic assessment of the agency, People Inc. hired an outside accounting firm to determine Autism Services' financial viability.

The findings revealed an operating deficit that threatened the continuation of Autism Services' programs and services. Despite aggressive and deliberate efforts over the last several months to stabilize operations, Autism Services' Board of Directors has determined the only way to preserve these vital services is to transition the operation of its programs to other agencies with the capacity and expertise to support them.

"Since Autism Services came to us for assistance, the goal has been to ensure the continuation and consistency of high-quality services," said Anne McCaffrey, President and CEO of People

Inc. “After the results of our due diligence, we are grateful to have arrived at this best-case scenario, with The Summit Center taking on what they do best, and People Inc. doing what we do best. In the end, the winners are the people served and their families.”

People Inc., a leading provider of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and The Summit Center, well known for its expertise in educational programs for people with autism, are working together with Autism Services to ensure a smooth and seamless transition as Autism Services ceases operation.

McCaffrey and Lisa Foti, CFO and incoming CEO of The Summit Center, said they are thoughtfully planning for little or no disruption to the day-to-day services currently provided, including affording employment opportunities Autism Services employees and keeping the schools and programs in the same locations.

“We know that change can be very disruptive for students with autism, so our initial focus is on the seamless continuation of educational services provided by staff members they know and trust,” said Foti. “On the financial side, when these additional students come under Summit’s umbrella, we will be able to take advantage of higher reimbursement rates while continuing to provide a high-quality educational program.”

The OPWDD services moving under the auspice of People Inc. include 12 group homes with a total of 53 residents, two day programs serving 64 people, and other programs for neurodiverse adults and children. All Autism Services employees who work as direct support professionals in these programs will have employment opportunities at People Inc.

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#### **ABOUT PEOPLE INC.**

People Inc. provides a diverse array of support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, as well as health care services, senior services, services for the Deaf and hard of hearing, and affordable housing. Founded more than 50 years ago and built on a strong foundation of innovation, collaboration, community and inclusion, People Inc. helps people achieve greater degrees of independence and productivity, providing superior programs throughout Western New York and the Greater Rochester regions.

#### **ABOUT THE SUMMIT CENTER**

The Summit Center provides educational, clinical, adult, and community-based programs and services to more than 1000 Western New York children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities. Its specialized school, Summit Academy, provides a 12-month educational program to 340 students from 38 WNY school districts at two locations in Amherst, 150 Stahl Road and 165 Creekside Drive.