

## **When Children With Special Needs Grow Up: How to Ensure Life-Long Services, Support, and Legal Protections for Someone You Love**

- Experts to offer advice on planning for major life transitions, including young adults “aging out” of the school system and continuing care after the death of parents or guardians.
- Information regarding power of attorney and guardianship applies to anyone making decisions on behalf of someone else, including adult children of incapacitated parents.

*Paoli, PA...* Royer-Greaves School for Blind will offer a free symposium on legal protections and other steps that families should take to ensure loved ones with a disability have the support and services they need for a lifetime. The event will be held 1 p.m. March 22 at the school’s Manor House, 118 S. Valley Road, Paoli.

“This is about being the voice for your loved one, and knowing your rights and theirs,” said Royer-Greaves Executive Director Vicky Mayer. “It’s about making certain that the right person legally has the right to make decisions on behalf of the person with a disability, throughout his or her life.”

Two experts will speak on topics ranging from establishing power of attorney or guardianship to maximizing Medicaid funding for community-based services: Rebecca A. Hobbs, Esquire, a Certified Elder Law Attorney (CELA) with O’Donnell, Weiss & Mattei, P.C., and Mimi Ferraro, an educational consultant and founder of Next Steps Life Solutions.

Ferraro will discuss challenges and solutions for parents and guardians with a child who is or will soon be 21 and must transition from school-based to community-based services. “Parents are very, very overwhelmed,” she said. Their children still need vocational, educational, social, and therapeutic services, and now that they are no longer in school, it’s up to the family to choose the right ones, and figure out how to pay for them, Ferraro said.

For some people with disabilities, housing and employment are also needed.

Ferraro will provide guidance on important early steps, including determining Medicaid eligibility, establishing a list of goals, and finding the right providers to help fulfill them.

Hobbs will outline the legal steps that must be taken to establish financial and health decision-making authority for those over age 18 who are unable to make their own decisions, or who may not be able to do so in the future.

Mayer, Royer-Greaves’ executive director, notes that parents who have always made decisions for their child with disabilities may be blindsided to realize that once the child turns 18, they can no longer do so without first going through the proper legal procedures. This is where Hobbs’ expertise comes in.

She will discuss the various types of power of attorney and guardianship and when each is appropriate. Both grant an individual the legal authority to make decisions on behalf of another person. “The main difference is guardianship is court-appointed while power of attorney is something the individual chooses and decides.”

Hobbs will also discuss pitfalls. For example, power of attorney forms are available online, but those don’t always hold up, particularly in Pennsylvania. “Pennsylvania has specific rules for the content of the document. If you do it yourself, it may not be accepted by doctors or financial institutions,” Hobbs said. That could force a guardianship proceeding through the courts, potentially in an emergency situation.

Both Ferraro and Hobbs will touch on long-term financial preparations in their talks, such as the establishment of special needs trusts. “Caregivers are not going to be here forever, but their children are not going to grow out of a disability,” Ferraro said.

Hobbs notes that the trustee is only charged with managing the assets held in the trust, while the person holding the power of attorney or guardianship help manage the individual’s day to day financial needs. She will explain more about this coordination of effort. She will also discuss the differences between Special Needs Trusts and Supplemental Needs Trusts and how each are funded.

Both presenters will take questions. Refreshments will be provided to attendees during a break between the two talks, so while the seminar is free, please reserve your space by calling Royer-Greaves at 610-644-1810.

**About the presenters:**



**Rebecca A. Hobbs, Esquire**, is Certified as an Elder Law Attorney (CELA) by the National Elder Law Foundation as authorized by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. She is an associate attorney with O'Donnell, Weiss & Mattei, P.C., of Pottstown and Phoenixville. She fell in love with special needs planning and elder law in her first job out of Regent University School of Law and has never looked back. "I enjoy helping people, and I enjoy working with families and helping them navigate through the various legal issues related to a child with a disability or an elder who needs care," she said. Learn more at [www.owmlaw.com](http://www.owmlaw.com).



**Mimi Ferraro, founder of Next Steps Life Solutions**, has been an educator for 35 years. She holds a Doctorate in Special Education from Gratz College and teaches special education courses at both Gratz College and Temple University. Ferraro also ran an inclusion program as the education director of a local synagogue and is a rabbi. "I was hearing more and more, 'I don't know what to do now that my child is 21,'" she said. That confusion and worry led her to launch her business, which helps parents analyze their child's needs and goals, find services to meet those needs and goals, and insures the young adult is getting all the funding they are entitled to receive. Learn more at [www.nextstepslifesolutions.com](http://www.nextstepslifesolutions.com).



**About Royer-Greaves:** Royer-Greaves School for Blind provides a caring and supportive place for school-age children and adults ages 21 and over, with visual and other impairments to learn and train for their most rewarding and independent lives. For more information, please visit [www.royer-greaves.org](http://www.royer-greaves.org).