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## **Chicago Area Advocacy Firm Introduces Special Needs Family Membership Community to Allay Fears, Anxiety and Aloneness**

### ***Protected Tomorrows Launches Growing Community Feb. 12***

LINCOLNSHIRE, IL (Jan. 28, 2013) - Protected Tomorrows, the nation's leading special needs advocacy firm, will launch its new web-based Family Membership Community with a special presentation from developmental disability consultant Ed McManus – 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 12 at the Protected Tomorrows LifeCare Center, 103 Schelster Road, Lincolnshire. McManus is a former state Coordinator of the Home-based Services Program, a retiree from the Illinois Division of Developmental Disabilities, and a father to a child with special needs.

The [Protected Tomorrows Family Membership Community](#) is a web-based tool that gives families across the nation and around the world information from experienced professionals on how to plan a safe and fulfilling future for a loved one with special needs. It also gives overwhelmed caregivers a chance to connect with the Protected Tomorrows team one-on-one and with each other, via an online Forum.

Reports by Head Start, a federal program that enhances the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children ages birth to five from low-income families, show an almost universal feeling of isolation at the time of a disability diagnosis. And the National Family Caregivers Association states: mothers of children with intellectual disabilities have higher depression rates than parents of normally developing children.

"Many families with a loved one with special needs feel alone in their efforts to give their child the best life possible," said Mary Anne Ehlert, president and founder of Protected Tomorrows, who has specialized in special needs planning for more than 25 years. "Our clients have long expressed the desire to get connected with other families in similar situations, so we're helping to facilitate that through our web-based Family Membership Community."

Globally, an estimated one billion people have a disability of some type. In America alone, the number stands at about 55 million. Protected Tomorrows' mission includes helping families with all types of developmental, mental and cognitive disabilities – no matter where they might be located around the globe.

"There is such a need to serve this population worldwide," Ehlert said. "We've gotten huge interest from families in many different countries." Outside of the U.S., Protected Tomorrows has the strongest presence in the United Kingdom region.

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## ***Protected Tomorrows' Online Family Membership Program– page 2***

"One of the benefits of the Protected Tomorrows Family Membership Community is that we are now able to help families where they're at – physically, at home and while travelling; or in each season of life, whether it's getting their child the help he or she needs at school or transitioning to a residential program," said Teri Bodeman, director of Family Advocacy Services at Protected Tomorrows.

The Online Family Membership Community is geared toward special needs families facing transitional times – when a parent first hears of a life-altering medical diagnosis, when children are leaving the school system, or when adult siblings are stepping into the caregiving role for their brother or sister.

In addition to access to Protected Tomorrows experts and like-minded families through the Community Forum, the Family Membership Program provides:

- Webinars on how to safely navigate the future
- Protected Tomorrows' proprietary Online Future Care Planning System
- Access to a one-of-a-kind "special needs library" filled with information about government benefits, legal options and more

Annual membership to the Online Family Membership is \$19.99 for a limited time.

In his Feb. 12 presentation, Mr. McManus will address several timely special needs-related issues. Topics include:

- Funding and services through the Illinois PUNS (Prioritization for Urgency of Need for Services) list, a statewide database that records information about people with developmental disabilities
- The role of Personal Assistance Services (PAS) agencies for special needs families
- The ramifications of the Ligas Consent Decree, a legal settlement giving those living in Illinois Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled (ICF-DDs) the right to choose community housing.

In addition to sharing his expertise, Mr. McManus will be available to answer questions about Illinois services for individuals with special needs.

"We're excited to have Ed part of our kick-off event," Ehlert said. "He illustrates the expertise we are bringing to special needs families through our Family Membership Community – a supportive web-based community of special needs families and experts offering guidance, coaching and planning for a loved one with a disability."

The Feb. 12 event also will offer demonstrations of the Family Membership system as well as door prizes, including a raffle for a free membership.

Space is limited and registration is required. To reserve your spot for this free event on Feb. 12 event or learn more about the Family Membership Community, please call (847) 522-8086, or e-mail [registration@protectedtomorrows.com](mailto:registration@protectedtomorrows.com).

### **About Protected Tomorrows**

*Protected Tomorrows, Inc., headquartered in the Chicago suburb of Lincolnshire, is the leader in enhancing the lives of families with members who have special needs. Through their work with clients and the family's advisors, and alongside of other advocates and legislators, Protected Tomorrows addresses many concerns of families with special needs such as: future care funding, government benefits, legal considerations, residential options, employment opportunities, recreational choices, education options and family communications. For questions, contact us at [info@protectedtomorrows.com](mailto:info@protectedtomorrows.com), or visit [www.protectedtomorrows.com](http://www.protectedtomorrows.com).*