



community interactions inc.

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Seizing an Opportunity for Growth



(Left to right) Angelique Sackes, Esther Cooper, Sepideh Motemavelian, and Winnifred Barbu attend a course on Managing Conflict being conducted by Mark Bernstein.

High turnover and burnout are two of the biggest challenges facing the human service industry nationwide. These challenges threaten the programs and services that provide people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with opportunities for inclusion and engagement in their communities.

For some time now, CI has recognized that having experienced, knowledgeable, and skilled staff guarantees that individuals with IDD can achieve inclusion in their communities, and live meaningful, productive lives. To that end, CI began introducing staff development training several years ago. The initial training model was offered to administrative staff only, but has since been expanded to include all staff. To effect this, CI brought on Mark Bernstein as Director of Qualitative Compliance and Staff Development. For the past 16 months, Mark has been developing and rolling out a three-track Personal/Professional Development and Training program.

“The goal for this comprehensive program is to give our staff the opportunity to grow in their professional development,” says Mark. “We want people to see how ongoing training and development are closely linked with high morale, low turnover, quality services, and staff satisfaction. It’s not just about skill building, but helping people become better employees all round.”

CI’s staff of 500 is required to take 24 hours of training every year. Eight of those 24 hours are required for all staff and include classes on Fire Safety, CPR/First Aid and Dysphagia. The other 16 hours are elective classes organized under the three aforementioned tracks:

- Track One for CI Leaders, launched this year, offers courses designed for managers and supervisors
- Track Two for Emerging Leaders, to be initiated after the first of the year 2017, is designed for Direct Support Professionals who have the interest and potential to obtain supervisory/management positions
- Track Three for all staff, launched this year, offers courses related to the practices and principles of Therapeutic Options

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Our Mission:

Community Interactions, Inc. (CI) provides quality services for people with intellectual, physical and behavioral health challenges to help them create lifestyles consistent with their communities while respecting individual choice, self determination and culture.



Message from the CEO
Donald Szegda
President/CEO

As the economic world changes, there is little doubt that nonprofit organizations such as CI must change as well. The challenge for alternative sources of funding is one of our primary goals moving into the future.

CI and other providers have not received a cost of living increase in five years. While we have been able to provide small increases in salaries for our staff, these raises have been less than adequate. Our advocacy partners are constantly challenging the State Office of Intellectual Disabilities and the Department of Human Services to provide additional funding and, hopefully, they will be successful. The bottom line is that we cannot wait.

We are moving to develop our new Strategic Plan for 2017 to 2022. As we move forward, we are unveiling our Fund Development Plan. This plan will have a four tier approach designed to enable our donors to contribute at four different levels. The donation request and available levels are outlined in an appeal which will be sent in a separate mailing.

Be on the lookout for additional information on our Fund Development Program 2017. Your support and assistance will be greatly appreciated.

In addition, we are actively working to expand our services by providing fee-for-service programs in the areas of staff development and innovative programs related to sensory motor programs and services for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Many thanks to the families and friends of CI, and to the staff for their continued care, support and development of the persons we support.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy new year.

Opportunity for Growth

In the past year, upwards of 150 staff have attended elective courses. The goal is for staff to take more elective classes that are of interest to them and help them improve their skills and knowledge. “I’m hoping someday that staff will fill their 24 hours and want to continue taking more classes because they find them compelling,” says Mark.

The challenge so far, with the courses already being offered at various times in a day and different days, has been for staff to carve out time in their schedules to attend training. Thanks to an online registration form, the process of registering has been streamlined. It is easier for staff to sample an array of classes and then register for them online. An online calendar shows available classes over a three-month period, so staff is better able to work those classes into their schedule.

“We’re trying to be as flexible as we can,” says Mark. “We want to see the agency adopt a culture where there is constant self-improvement – to build their skills as employees, to boost their confidence, self-improvement, and sense of professionalism to hopefully grow into this job and embrace it.”

Honoring CI Loved Ones and Friends

In Memoriam/Honor Gift

Send the acknowledgment to:

Enclosed is a gift of:

Name: _____

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PEOPLE

Barbara Vecchiolli



Barbara "Barb" Vecchiolli has a long history with CI, but an even longer history with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Growing up in Ardmore, Pa., with an older brother with developmental disabilities, Barb experienced first-hand what families and parents go through raising a child with special needs. This experience ultimately inspired her career path, and continues to inspire her today.

Setting out to pursue a career in nursing, Barb attended Neumann University, but after a change of heart, she switched her major to arts and psychology, graduating in 1986. While at Neumann she started working at Divine Providence Village and upon graduation joined CI as a Direct Support Professional, where she remained for 16 years, in which time she had risen to Assistant Director of the Day Program.

In 2002, Barb left CI to work with the aging population as a Program Specialist at Elwyn. In 2014, CI was happy to welcome her back as Program Coordinator at the Day Program. State certified as a Trained Investigator, Barb's responsibilities include case management, staff supervision and assisting with community activities scheduling.

Barb lives in Wallingford with her husband, John. Her daughter Christina teaches at Bayard Rustin High School in West Chester, and her son Philip is a recent graduate of the Williamson College of the Trades, where she's very involved as a volunteer on the auxiliary.

Joseph Amuti



When Joseph Amuti came to the U.S. in 1998 from Nairobi, Kenya he had no familiarity, whatsoever, with the special needs population, nor with the field of human services in which he found his career.

He more or less happened into it says Joseph, of his 18-year career serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Taking a job as a DSP with Dungarvin Delaware,

Joseph credits a former supervisor there with mentoring and inspiring him to pursue a career in the field.

As a Program Specialist with CI Delaware's Day Program, a post he has held for the past two years, Joseph oversees the supports for individuals served, coordinating and completing consumers' assessments and reports, implementing Essential Lifestyle Plans and mentoring staff, along with other duties.

What motivates him on a daily basis is seeing how individuals are achieving things others thought they could never achieve. "I don't see disabilities, I see abilities," he says.

In 2005, Joseph moved to Middletown, Del., from Delaware County, Pa., where his parents, four sisters and brother all settled. Since that time he has become a father of soon to be three-year old son, Jacob. Having his parents and siblings close by has been a great comfort and support. Plus...there's the free babysitting.

FOCUS ON

In Recognition and Appreciation of AQUA PA



Chris Saulino (left of center) and William Nix (center) presented AQUA PA's Olivia Hawkins with CI's first-ever Recognition Award. In attendance were Aqua administration and CI Day Program participants. Photo Credit: © Pictures by Todd

CI's Day Program is constantly striving to provide the individuals we serve with opportunities for greater inclusion in the community. Through volunteerism, vocational training, and other programs and services, including recreational opportunities, individuals are learning valuable social and life skills every day.

Partnering with businesses and organizations in the community has been essential to providing such opportunities for our folks, and CI staff is always on the lookout for ways to give individuals new meaningful experiences and chances for learning. As a way of recognizing community partners for their contributions, CI recently established the "In Recognition & Appreciation Award," and AQUA PA was its first recipient.



For the past two years, AQUA PA has allowed CI the use of its privately owned parkland tract on the banks of the Springton Reservoir in Newtown Square for recreational purposes. Instrumental in making that happen were Chris Saulino, CI's Day Program Director and DSP William Nix. Working with AQUA's Olivia Hawkins, Director of Quality for Customer Operations, they were able to secure use of the park three to five times a year for gatherings, cookouts, and even a carnival. It's been a win-win for Aqua and CI ever since.

On August 25th, CI presented AQUA's Olivia Hawkins with its inaugural recognition award as a way of thanking her and the water utility for its generosity.



CI Day Program participant, Kedar Kingsberry, hands Donna Alston, AQUA's Communications Director, a CI tote bag filled with goodies. Photo Credit: © Pictures by Todd

HAPPENINGS



Lead organizers, Samantha Swain (left) and Jamie Stafford at this year's annual Health & Safety Day held on Oct. 20th.



Michelle Cummings, assisted by Carissa Cucchi, learns to vote at the "Make Your Vote Count" event at Child Guidance Resource Center, sponsored by the MAX Association on Sept. 27th.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Technology and Art: A Creative Combination



Combining her experience and knowledge of computers and passion for art, business owner Linda Christiansen is giving people with IDD an opportunity to discover skills and talents that they and others never thought they had.

In 2000, armed with a degree in business, Linda started her own computer company, DelcoTechs, which provides PC and Network Solutions in Delaware County and the region. Soon after, she began providing computer training for people with special needs taking on consultant work from various human service providers in the Philadelphia area.

What she quickly noticed was the individuals she was working with at the time weren't engaging. "It became clear that it was boring for them," she says. "So I tapped into my art background and things took off from there."

By melding technology and art, Linda was able to draw out people's innate creativity. This discovery led her to creating, in 2004, her second business, Sillynut.com - art and computer instruction for children, teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism.

Hired by CI in May 2015, as an art consultant for its Day Program, eight months later Linda was asked to provide computer classes to participating individuals. Every Wednesday, she conducts a computer class and Thursdays are dedicated to art. A huge recycler, Linda uses mostly found objects and materials in her art classes, which helps keep supply costs to a minimum. She has brought in sand, shells and rocks from the beach to incorporate into art projects, and depends on donations as well. The results adorn the rooms and hallways of the Day Program for all to enjoy.

One particular computer project that has gotten students excited has been helping to produce the bimonthly Day Program newsletter. Through the computer class, Linda is teaching students how to do internet research, and search for recipes and other things online, which the students then type up. Then these are all incorporated into the newsletter. The work submitted, including Q&A's, interviews with CI staff, and profiles, is left unedited and uncorrected, in order, as Linda says to encourage self-improvement and confidence. "They're my star reporters, I just put it all together," she says.

Linda is seeing a lot of improvement in the skills the students are developing, as well as in their growing confidence. "It's beautiful to see the students expressing themselves and learning either through the words they type, or the art they create. In the process they're teaching us something about them."



Linda with students (from left) Hillary King, Khadijah Walker, and Ahnyay Porter creating the design for CI's Holiday Card.