



# community interactions inc.

# connections

740 South Chester Road, Swarthmore, PA 19081 • 610.328.9008 • www.communityinteractions.org

## Cause for Celebration



A smiling and glamorous Nancy Salmons at last year's CI Holiday Party. (Photo right) Sisters Judy and Nancy in 1942, on the steps of their home in West Oak Lane, Philadelphia.

After the illness, Nancy's development became delayed, and she reverted back to an infant state.

Judy, a retired delivery room nurse, said her parents had a very difficult time raising Nancy without the kind of resources and supports common today. Nancy, she said, suffered from severe behavioral challenges and hyperactivity and needed constant supervision. "My parents never went to the movies together. Somebody always had to be home with Nancy."

"In those days, anyone with an intellectual disability, was institutionalized," said Judy.

With little recourse, Nancy's parents made the heart-wrenching decision to admit her to Pennhurst when she was eight years old.

The family visited Nancy frequently, taking her on outings, home for short stays, and to the shore, where their father had built a summer residence. Nancy stayed at Pennhurst until 1973, when she was transferred to Embreeville State

Nancy Salmons has great cause to celebrate this summer. June marks the 40th anniversary of her move to CI, and community living. But life wasn't always rosy for the 77 year-old CI resident.

On Mother's Day in 1949, eight-year-old Nancy left her anguished mother's side and entered Pennhurst State School and Hospital, where she remained for 24 years. Mother's Day would never be the same again for the Salmons family.

Nancy was born a healthy six pounds and seven ounces in September of 1940, to Elizabeth and Joseph Salmons of West Oak Lane in Philadelphia. She hit all the early infant milestones, sitting up at seven months, crawling at eight, and walking and talking a month shy of her first birthday. Then, inexplicably, on October 12, 1941, at 13 months, she was suddenly overcome by seizures, which lasted 24 hours. Rushed to St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, she was diagnosed with encephalitis, inflammation of the brain, most often caused by a viral infection. She remained at St. Christopher's for a week.

"The damage was already done," said Judy Salmons, Nancy's younger sister by 15 months. "Even if we'd had antibiotics then, they wouldn't have helped. It was too late."



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## Message from the CEO

Donald Szegda

President/CEO

I recently reviewed what, according to Meg Nielson, our excellent Director of Communication and Outreach, is the first CI Newsletter titled "The Connection" that was published on June 3, 2003... 15 years ago. What struck me the most were the stories told by two individuals we continue to support, Melanie and Harry, and who continue to share their stories of their accomplishments and contributions, and how their lives have been enriched ever since they came into the CI family.

Their stories, I am certain, reflect the outstanding support that they have received from our dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), who work to ensure that they, and the other 250 people CI supports, are kept safe, receive the proper level of care, and are provided with opportunities to live meaningful and productive lives in the community.

DSPs are so much more than caregivers; they are advocates, teachers, companions and friends, and the backbone of person-centered, community-based care. Their job is complex and demands skills, knowledge, ethical judgment, and the ability to establish trust and mutual respect that foster community and inclusion. Yet, despite their vital role in providing the essential supports and services to individuals with I/DD, DSPs and their profession are not sufficiently recognized by some policy makers, and the care system is facing a crisis due to low wages and high turnover.

Working with PAR (Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability), the MAX Association (Moving Agencies Toward Excellence), and the Ability Network of Delaware (AND), CI is actively advocating for rate increases at the state level to support living wages for our DSPs. For the past 10 years wages have flatlined and the crisis has escalated.

While our important efforts are ongoing in advocating for our DSPs, I want to take this opportunity to salute you and thank you for the outstanding work you do in making a difference in the lives of our CI family every single day.

Wishing everyone a safe and happy summer.

## 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.

# PEOPLE

## Maria Rosario



Upon graduating from high school, CI Direct Support Professional Maria Rosario immediately entered the field of human services – and she's never looked back. Her career started in geriatric care, and for 15 years she worked with seniors, taking a few nursing courses along the way. In 2000, on the positive recommendation of a friend, she made the switch to CI. Her immediate reaction was, "Oh my God, what have I done?!" she said with a laugh.

"At first, I was very nervous and scared," she said. "But I quickly got used to it and loved it. I learn something different every day. It's been a very rewarding experience for me."

Originally born in Puerto Rico, Maria moved to New Jersey with her family when she was two months old. For most of her life, she's more or less had one foot here and one foot there, with her family now split between the two countries. Family there recently had their power restored after the devastating Hurricane Maria knocked it out eight months ago. She's grateful they are all doing well. Maria herself, a loving and nurturing force of nature, lives in Chester where she and her husband have raised their five children.

Although today she works in CI's Day Program, Maria has, over the years, also worked in the organization's various other programs – residential, life-sharing and home-based waiver. In the Day Program, Maria provides her groups of individuals with community experiences and opportunities that foster independence and inclusion, keeping busy with social, educational, recreational and volunteer opportunities that take them out and about.

"I've learned so much," she said. "And every day, I try to give my guys the best day ever."

## Ibrahim Sesay



Ibrahim Sesay did not set out to become a Direct Support Professional. With a degree in mechanical engineering from Sierra Leone's Technical Institute, Ibrahim's career path seemed set. It wasn't until he came to the U.S. in 1997, that his path took a sharp turn that led him to CI and a career in human services. "It was like a calling," he said.

This July, will mark Ibrahim's 19th year with CI. He first learned of the nonprofit through his cousin Lansana Bangura,

a longtime, dedicated CI DSP. Coincidentally, Ibrahim was not entirely unfamiliar with the kind of supports the organization provides. Back home in Sierra Leone, while a student, he had worked part time for several months assisting individuals with disabilities, a job he said he found rewarding.

A father of three, Abdul, 16, Saalif, 14, and daughter Yankain, 12, and husband to Zainab, also from Sierra Leone, whom he met here, Ibrahim makes his daily commute from his home, in Sicklerville, New Jersey, to his second home, Rutgers in Swarthmore. Rutgers was created last year, specifically for the three individuals he supports, and whom he's close to – Patrick, Morgan, and James, who needed a more accessible space.

"When you start out in this field, it's about making a living and securing yourself," he said. "After some time, the job becomes more than just a paycheck, it's about the care of people who need you and appreciate what you do."

What he does is a long way from mechanical engineering, but one thing he's been sure of along his path is, as he said, "I just like to help people."

# FOCUS ON

## A Proud Day for CI Self-Advocate Harry Pollock



All smiles, Self-Advocate Harry Pollock holds up Old Glory at the March 14th Delaware County Council meeting celebrating National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and the accomplishments of self-advocates.

acronym), formerly the Arc of Delaware County, whose offices are within CI's headquarters in Swarthmore.

One frequent visitor to the advocacy organization's offices is Harry

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (NDDAM), an observance established by President Ronald Reagan in 1987 to "increase public awareness of the needs and potential of Americans with developmental disabilities."

This past March, the Delaware County Council in collaboration with the Delaware County Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities held its annual meeting to formally recognize NDDAM, and as Councilman Kevin Madden said, "the contributions of people with intellectual disabilities... valued co-workers, family members and friends in our Delaware County community."

"The meeting showcases the abilities of people with disabilities," said Vera D'Ercole, Nonprofit Coordinator of the Delaware County Advocacy & Resource Organization (DCARO - not their official

# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Art and Inclusion on Full Display

This past winter, ten CI Day Program artists experienced the thrilling opportunity of having their art entered into a juried art show at Villanova University. "Expressions & Impressions," an exhibit of artwork by artists living with disabilities, was sponsored by the Villanova University Office of Disability Services and ran from February 2nd to March 26th.

Jumping at the opportunity, when it was presented to her by her client the Delaware County Advocacy & Resource Organization (DCARO - not their official acronym), formerly the Arc of Delaware County, CI art teacher Linda Christiansen, set about selecting current works of art from the many her students in CI's Day Program had created within the year. She also selected three works from another program she works with, Creative Gifts of Delaware County. In all, a baker's dozen was selected, ten from CI and three from Creative Gifts.

Linda gathered all the art, which included works in acrylic, pastels, dye on fabric, and multimedia pieces, labeled them with the artists' names and de-

# HAPPENINGS

Pollock, a CI resident, self-advocate, and member of DCARO, who likes to pop in for a quick chat with the staff as he goes about on his rounds, Vera noted. On one particular visit, prior to the March 14th Council meeting, Vera asked Harry if he could recite the Pledge of Allegiance – to which he responded, as Vera recounted, “Of course I can!”

“It was only about a half hour or so before Harry came into the office that day, that Eileen McDonald, our Executive Director, had been asked by the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, if we knew anyone who could recite the Pledge at the Council meeting,” said Vera.

Harry recited the Pledge perfectly and Vera, without a moment’s hesitation, said, “You’re it!”

The day of the Council meeting, Harry showed up looking dapper and hardly able to contain his excitement. The meeting recognized a number of individuals for their self-advocacy and everyone who participated received a certificate, said Vera, including Harry.

“He did an awesome job,” she said. “Harry exemplifies the strides self-advocates and advocacy organizations have made for people with I/DD to live meaningful, engaging, and inclusive lives in their communities. We’re so proud of him.”



A proud day for Harry as he joined Delaware County self-advocates and community supporters being honored at the Delaware County Council’s annual meeting celebrating National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

**COMMUNITY CALENDAR**

**Black & White Local Chapter**  
 Black & White Local Chapter is a group of people who are interested in the Black & White community. The chapter is currently looking for members. If you are interested, please contact the chapter at 610.328.9008.

**Senior Citizens Dinner**  
 The Senior Citizens Dinner is a special event for our senior citizens. It is held every year and is a great opportunity to meet and greet with friends and family. The dinner is held at the Swarthmore Senior Center and is a great opportunity to enjoy a meal and some entertainment.

**Delaware County Council Meeting**  
 The Delaware County Council Meeting is held every month and is a great opportunity to meet with your representatives and discuss local issues. The meeting is held at the Delaware County Courthouse and is open to the public.

**Philadelphia Eagles Game**  
 The Philadelphia Eagles are a professional American football team that plays in the National Football League (NFL). They are based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and play their home games at Lincoln Financial Field.

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CI’s oldest resident, Josie Beard, celebrated her 87th birthday this past December and made the news. To commemorate the event, CI submitted her photo to the Delaware County Daily Times, who ran it in their Community section on January 16th, and the Swarthmorean, who ran it online.



Fly Eagles, Fly! When the Philadelphia Eagles soared to Super Bowl victory this past February, CI staff sported their Eagles wear to work in a show of celebration.



Proud CI Artists at the Villanova juried art show opening reception. (L. to R.) Delia Rodriguez, Deanna McBride, Charles Graham, Gustavo Valencia, Ben Flickenger, Leonard Shalkowski, Jonathan Murphy, and Ryan Smalley, standing behind Ben.

livered them to Vera D’Ercole at DCARO, who in turn delivered the art to Villanova. On February 2nd, a reception to meet the artists was held in the gallery and a number of CI artists, staff and family members attended. Although not everyone was able to attend, Linda made sure they had the exhibit on their calendars to see before it came down at the end of March.

“They were beyond excited to see their work in a gallery, as were their families and staff,” said Linda, who has been teaching art at CI for the past three years, and who in 2004 established Sillynut.com, a program of art and computer instruction for children, teens, and adults with I/DD, including autism. She is looking to establish an art workshop in Delaware County, where individuals can come once a week for two hours to exercise their creativity.

“More and more people with disabilities are being recognized as significant contributors to the art community,” said Linda. “What my students come up with and what they do is amazing, and I’m looking into other opportunities for them to showcase their talents.”



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Hospital in Chester County. Then in 1978, as state institutions began closing, Nancy moved into a CI residence, and her life back in the community began anew.

“Each time there was a change, it was a change for the better,” said Judy, who added that their parents were very involved with Nancy in the years she was away. “Embreeville was a step up from Pennhurst, and CI and community living was the best change. Nancy had more friends, she was more active, and took on more responsibilities. We all noticed a positive difference in her.”

“We are a very tight-knit family, and always were,” said Judy. Nancy’s move to CI brought the family even closer, as their parents had moved from the city to Delaware County. Their father Joseph passed away in 1997, and their mother was 96 when she passed away in 2013. While their mother was alive, Nancy would spend weekends with her, and now she spends overnights with Judy, watching old Lawrence Welk shows, and playing cards, two of her favorite things.

Although that fateful day in 1941 changed their lives forever, the family’s strong bond got them through the hard times, and they made the best of every moment they spent with each other.

“Nancy is my sister, and I love her. We have a lot of fun together.”

### Honoring CI Loved Ones and Friends

In Memoriam/Honor Gift

Send the acknowledgment to:

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