



community interactions inc.

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Student Pride



When Sara Hudson walked into CI's Swarthmore offices one day early this past summer and announced that she would be starting college in a number of weeks, she was met with resounding enthusiasm and support. "You go girl!" was the chorus heard along CI's halls.

Sara, 29, is one of only three individuals with I/DD in Delaware County who have been accepted into Widener University's pilot Inclusive Higher Education Program. This pilot program was launched by Julie Heydeman, a Widener student set to graduate this coming May with a master's in social work, and who interned at CI during her undergraduate sophomore year.

It was during the start of her senior undergrad year, while Julie was looking into doing a disability awareness research project, that she was offered the opportunity to write the grant proposal to receive funding for the program. Widener had been interested in launching an inclusive work-readiness college program for some time, but needed the right person to get it off the ground. Around the country there are about 270 universities with such programs for people with disabilities, and in PA, there are 19 colleges who are part of the Pennsylvania Inclusive Higher Education Consortium (PIHEC), 12 of which have an inclusive higher education program in place, the other five like Widener are in pilot or proposal phase.

"I already had a passion for inclusion and working with individuals with disabilities, that when the opportunity came up, I couldn't say no. You could say it fell into my lap," said Julie, who was offered the opportunity by the Dean of Education to attend special development conferences about inclusive higher education. She wrote her proposal, which was accepted, and with PIHEC funding in place began meeting with other members of the consortium and learning everything she could about their programs. As she visited campuses across the state, Widener's program started coming alive.

When Sara, who up until three years ago lived with her grandmother, and who is now a CI resident,

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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

With the holiday season upon us, I feel that this is a good time to thank all of the people who make life here at CI so very happy for the individuals that we support, which, in turn, makes us happy. The CI staff, who work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, always pull together during critical times, whether it be a sudden snow storm, power outage or when the people we support have significant health care needs. The support that staff provides to our consumers is also extended to their families...especially during critical...and sometimes terminal...illnesses.

Then again, we definitely know how to celebrate at CI. The Spirit of Philadelphia Cruise was a huge hit with folks; there were so many smiling faces - almost as many as there were at the wonderful Thanksgiving meal that staff and the administrative team organized for our individuals. Also, our renewal of the All Agency Meeting for PA made for a delightful evening of information, prizes and camaraderie.

And...finally...I especially want to extend heartfelt thanks to our generous "angels" and donors. Because of them, many of those we support with extremely limited resources, are able to have gifts to open this holiday season and are also able to go on a vacation. The Patricia Saulino Vacation Fund has made it possible for several individuals to vacation at the beach this summer, some ventured to Chicago on a bus trip, and a few lucky folks even went to Disneyworld. One young gentleman has desperately wanted to go to Germany for the past eight years - we're still working on that one!

So...from the bottom of my heart...and on behalf of everyone here at CI, we thank you.

Wishing you the happiest and healthiest of holiday seasons!

started college for the first time this past August, she didn't know what to expect. "I was nervous at first," she said. "I didn't know it was going to be as hard as it is, but I like it. I like the homework."

Another person who didn't know what to expect was CI DSP Jane Bostwick, who attends classes with Sara and who is her guide and cheerleader. Jane has only been working with Sara for the past year through the Home-based Waiver program. She went from working with Sara for eight hours a week, to 18, ever since Sara started her two classes at Widener - Intro to Hospitality Management and Freshman Seminar. Jane said it's been challenging, but so far successful.

"I have to let [Sara] be as successful as she can be on her own," said Jane. "I'm encouraging her towards success, but she has to do it. I might know an answer, but I have to get her to the point that she knows the answer herself, and that process takes three times longer than the average student."

Ironically, Jane gets stressed out more about tests than does Sara. "If she's not stressed, then why am I taking on stress that I don't need," Jane laughed.

Sara's got a full plate at the moment, but she doesn't mind that. She likes being busy. In addition to being a student, she also works at Wawa five mornings a week, a job she's had since 2011. Once her shift is over, she and Jane head to classes Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

"My goal is to get into food and hospitality," said Sara. "But right now, I love being a student, and having access to the school and campus life."

You go girl!

Honoring CI Loved Ones and Friends

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PEOPLE

Carmen McDonald



In her 12 years at Community Interactions, Carmen McDonald has worn several hats. With lightening recall she can tell you the exact day she started at CI as Administrative Assistant for Programs and Services... June 26, 2006. Since then she has served as Recruitment and Benefits Coordinator, then Recruitment Coordinator, followed by floating Administrative Assistant, to ultimately filling her present position as Executive Assistant.

A Delaware County native, Carmen graduated from Chester High School. She attended the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) and Ashford University, as well as Cheyney University, where she also worked for five years as an administrative assistant for institutional advancement.

Considering her professional background (one of her first jobs was with The Delaware County Intermediate Unit (DCIU) Head Start, and prior to her move to Cheyney, she worked for an insurance company), coming to CI was a significant change, but, she said, an enriching and inspiring one.

"You really have to open your heart and mind and not look at the disability but look at the person," said Carmen. "The whole model of how CI wants to give individuals a better quality of life here is amazing."

Carmen recently moved from Chester Springs to the Coatesville area with her husband Marc, and three children, Hannah, Savannah, and Marc Jr. Her children are no strangers to the CI family. For years now they have joined Carmen on the job, volunteering on days off from school and whenever they can, often begging her to bring them in. The experience has been very positive.

"Like me, my children have learned so much from CI, and that includes being more aware and caring, accepting and understanding of others and what they are going through," she said.

Andoria Starkie



For DSP Andoria Starkie, her 20-year-long career at CI has been more than a job...it's been a labor of love. Ever since she started with the nonprofit, she has worked with the same three individuals, Jack, Aaron and Ed, and wouldn't change a thing.

Prior to joining CI and finding her passion, Andoria, a West Philadelphia native, who now resides in Delaware, had been taking care of her grandmother, an experience she said that helped prepare her for her role at CI.

Andoria typically works overnight and some days in the Chichester, Delaware County home the three gentlemen have shared for years. Over two decades, she has carved out a schedule that has worked for her...in raising her son, Domencio Brown, who will be 27 this year, and who grew up knowing Jack, Aaron and Ed, and...in accommodating her love of travel, which she does often with her fiancé, Rudolph Davis.

In the early years, it was permitted for DSPs to bring the people they worked with to their homes to meet their families and share in the holidays and special occasions, something Andoria did often. Today she takes them on vacations. She noted that it's a benefit to individuals to have the same people in their lives.

"Most people with disabilities don't like change," she said. "It can be very unsettling."

"Being a DSP is everything to me. I often put myself in their shoes and say to myself, if when I get old, I pray to God I get someone like me to take care of me, like I take care of them. I would never quit the job, they would have to fire me, because I would never leave them. I love them."

FOCUS ON

Recipe for a Healthy Living



Cody Ingram and DSP Tondeleyo "Tondy" Claybrook prepare dinner. My25 provides weekly menus and meal plans that are e-mailed directly to the house managers.

Last year, in an effort to promote health and wellness through diet and nutrition, as well as to give staff and the individuals CI supports the tools and resources to lead healthy and productive lives, CI initiated the My25 pilot program within six of its homes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults with disabilities are three times more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions than adults without disabilities. Numerous studies over the past decade have shown that people with disabilities experience worse health and poorer access to health care than the general population, and are

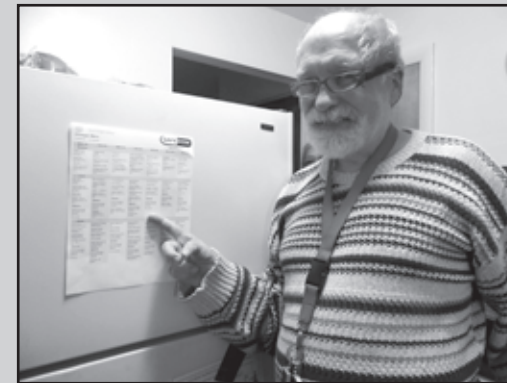
vulnerable to high rates of health risks including physical inactivity and obesity. In addition to being vulnerable to disability-related conditions, they are also at higher risk of chronic conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer and heart disease.

It is primarily for these reasons that CI is piloting My25, a program created by the Illinois-based company Mainstay. "My" refers to taking ownership of one's health and diet, and "25" has two meanings: 25 grams of fiber daily, and healthy starches, lean proteins and fruits and vegetables, each occupying 25 percent of one's meal.

My25 is a content and technology-based product that delivers weekly menus, meal plans and shopping lists, as well as online resources and instructions for meal prep. Everything is customized to an individual's health condition and concerns, dietary restrictions, schedules and food preferences.

"We first looked at the individual and from there planned menus for the home," said Christopher Lynn, CI's Operations Director for Programs & Services. "It is user-friendly and has taken a lot of the guesswork out of preparing menus and meals on a daily basis, and has streamlined the process. We're seeing it as a win-win for consumers and staff alike, who very often prepare meals together."

On a weekly basis, the menus are electronically sent via email to the house managers. Each menu generates a separate grocery list and ingredient amounts.



Harry Pollock points to the My25 weekly menu plan.

"We've had a good number of success stories over the year," said Christopher. "We've had some weight loss and improved health and overall improved nutritional intake. Some people jumped into it and others were more hesitant, but they're making their own healthy choices in their snacks and meals - it's really been great to watch."

CI is currently looking into implementing My25 agency wide.

HAPPENINGS



CI residents Ronnie Keattes and Dana Kelly are all smiles as they get set to board the Spirit of Philadelphia for a cruise along the Delaware River on November 10th. Seventy CI family members attended the trip that was organized by PA Residential Program Specialists.



On October 25th, CI held its annual Health and Safety Day. CI family members gathered for a group shot outside the Swarthmore headquarters. The day-long event presented a variety of events to promote healthy lifestyles.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Jim Bradley Jr.: A CI Celebrity

Jim Bradley Jr. will be turning 55 this January, and given his celebrity status at CI and beyond, you can guarantee there will be cake and certainly more than a few hugs and high fives.

A fixture at CI, Jim has been a part of the CI family for almost 20 years. His father, Jim Bradley Sr., said his son loves being at CI and is certain the feeling is mutual. "Staff don't like to see him with a day off," he chuckled, "And there's no other place Jim would rather be."

Jim started out in the Day Program taking part in the Community-based Program and spending most of his time out volunteering for, among other causes, Meals on Wheels. Jim graduated from Elwyn's Davidson School and at the time took on employment in their sheltered workshop doing contract work for the military, making bandages and medals. A stint working in maintenance at an offsite Elwyn program ended after a year, much to his disappointment. He didn't want to return to Elwyn, so remained at home for three years until someone recommended CI.

Today, Jim splits his time between working as a member of the housekeeping crew and receiving Home-based Waiver services, which get him out into the community on a daily basis. He's a responsible and self-sufficient worker and gets around to see everybody. He lives at home with his Mom Peggy and Dad Jim, and is very close with his younger sister Nancy, her husband Ray their four children, TJ, Taylor, and twins Jason and Justin. As an uncle he's always concerned about his nieces and nephews, something to which his Dad and CI Executive Assistant Carmen McDonald can attest.

"Jim's very protective of them and very involved with family," she said. "He's also very involved here at CI and is on hand to help with anything you need. He's a joy to be around and I love him to death."

No one would agree more than Diane Mignone, CI Purchasing Coordinator, whose office Jim likes to visit often, and who is one of Jim's favorite people.

As an avid Philadelphia sports fan, he keeps up with all the different team schedules, said his Dad. He's also been very involved in Special Olympics for many years, and is on a bowling league, recently taking home gold at a tournament. Jim likes to stay up on current events and is usually armed with the morning's news when he gets into CI to start his day.

"Our son's always been a great communicator and has a great deal of empathy and compassion. He can do just about anything and we never treated him like anyone different. He's very independent and very detailed in his work, which he never brings home, by the way...so just don't ask him take out the trash," said Jim Bradley Sr. with a laugh.



Jim and CI pal, Diane Mignone hanging with the Chick-Fil-A cow.