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**Community Interactions**

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**A New Home**

Like Melanie and Lynne, they are enjoying their new downsized space, which Henry said has had a very positive effect on their lives.

Billy, Bill, and Michael are thrilled with their new single-family home in Brookhaven that features plenty of space and its own rec room with a pool table. Up until the move to the new house, during the summer of 2020, Billy and Bill had shared a townhouse together, also located in Brookhaven.

For Billy, an outgoing and well-known member of the Brookhaven community, it was vitally important that he remain in the area that has been his home for more than 20 years; a place, as Henry noted, that Billy has loved and known.

When it comes to making the final selection on a new residence, the CI team involves the prospective tenants, especially those who advocate for themselves and who are looking for specific features in a home. As in the case with Billy and Bill, who can advocate for themselves, they went along to inspect their Brookhaven home before the lease was locked in. "Once they saw it, they wanted to move in right away," Henry said.



(From Right) Michael, Billy, DSP Vivian Chavis, Team Facilitator Erica Harriott, and Bill.

**A New Home of Their Own**



Melanie (right) and Lynne are all smiles in their new CI home.

Looking for your dream home can be a challenge at any time, particularly during a housing shortage made worse by the pandemic. For people with disabilities and providers like Community Interactions who support them, the challenges are even greater given the many barriers to accessible and affordable housing in the community.

Fortunately, over the past year and a half, CI was able to acquire three new homes for seven of its residents in Delaware County – a major point of pride for everyone involved.

"The search for a home where the people we support can live and thrive in the community might take a long time," said CI Residential Director Henry Njenga. "This is especially true when we consider the short term or long term needs of the individuals."

Melanie and Lynne could not be happier with their new bungalow in Springfield, which was acquired this past spring. For Melanie, who uses a wheelchair, and Lynn, who uses a walker, accessibility was a chief concern. The Thomson Avenue house was renovated inside and out to accommodate the women's needs and was equipped with semi-smart home features. A tablet, which both women can access, controls the lights, TV, and thermostat. "Part of the home selection process involves a thorough inspection to ensure that the house would be appropriate for new residents and will meet all their health, safety and accessibility requirements," said Aisha Rice, CI Senior Program Specialist. "With remodeling, this home was made perfect for the women, and the location is great. They just love it."

Longtime housemates Chanh and Tynell moved into their new Pine Tree Drive home in Broomall a little more than a year ago. Because their previous house was too large for just the two of them, the CI Residential Team decided to find something smaller that was more manageable for the housemates.

con't on back page

**Our Mission:**

Build communities of compassion and inclusion for neurodiverse people through innovative services.



**Message from the CEO**

Christopher Saulino, Ph.D.  
President/CEO

As we bring 2021 to a close, I would like to take the time to acknowledge all the staff, individuals, stakeholders and family members for their dedication, support, and patience during yet another pandemic year.

The holiday season is upon us and we have many things to celebrate. Things have not progressed as fast as everyone had hoped, but we have made great strides to bring a sense of normalcy back during uncertain times.

Over the summer, I saw individuals and staff taking vacations and venturing back out in the world. I have seen folks getting out more and reconnecting with their community. We have both day programs in Pennsylvania and Delaware slowly getting back up and returning to their amazing volunteer work, supporting their local communities, and returning to normal routines, including attending art classes in the community.

I have heard from families that this will be the first year back where individuals will be visiting home again during the holidays. Staff also reiterated that this will be a more typical "holiday" than last year. We've recently administered vaccination boosters to our individuals and staff to ensure their health and safety, especially with our older population.

We continue to strengthen and expand our commitment to providing care to our individuals who experience complex medical conditions or need end-of-life care. CI is one of the few organizations to support people as they "age in place" instead of in a nursing home or hospital.

Our hardworking workforce is our biggest strength and I commend them for their dedication and commitment. Change is inevitable in life, and we are CI strong to meet any challenge.

Please have a safe and happy holiday season as we look forward to a brighter 2022!

**Honoring CI Loved Ones and Friends**

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# PEOPLE

## Andrew Bradell



Andrew Bradell always tries to make everyday a good day. "I'm always thankful for waking up and seeing another day," he said. "The one thing about me is I look at the positive side of how things are or can be."

Wise beyond his years, the 35-year-old Morton Delaware County native is a fixture in his community, who is known as "Mr. Popular," and has been told he should run for mayor.

Up until 15 years ago, when he joined the CI family as a resident, Andrew had lived with his mom Barbara, grandfather, older brother Jim, whom he speaks to twice a week, and an aunt. It was after his mother tragically passed away a week before Christmas from carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty heating system that he moved into his CI home in Morton. This time of year he said is still hard for him.

If you live in Morton, it's likely that you either know Andrew or have seen him riding his bike around town, as well as to and from his main job as a dishwasher at the New American Bistro in Ridley. For about eight years, Andrew commuted to Center City Philadelphia for his job at the law firm of Bennett, Bricklin & Saltzberg LLC, a job he took over from CI lifesharing resident Cleo Tyler who retired in 2010.

Not one to sit idle Andrew loves to help his friends and neighbors with landscaping, often assisted by his good friend Joe when he's available.

"I thank God every day for the love and support I receive from everyone here in Delaware County who look out for me," said Andrew. "So many people say they've made me a part of their family. It's such a great feeling."

## Gwen McCorkell



Gwen McCorkell always comes back to that four letter word "love" when it comes to describing her career with CI over the past 20 years – love that she gives and love that she receives from the people she's worked with in providing person-driven supports.

When Gwen joined CI as a DSP after 15 years working in the accounting department of what was then Wachovia Bank, she didn't think she'd last given she didn't have any experience in the field. It was a friend who worked at CI at the time who recommended she apply after she lost her job at the bank. The rest is history as they say.

For years she worked with two women, Connie and Tammy, and in various homes in Delaware County then she switched to the Day Program, where she's been ever since. The pandemic had her back in one of CI's homes in Valleybrook, and doing more community outings.

Gwen, a mother of four and grandmother of nine, who moved to Lansdowne 15 years ago with her husband of 34 years, Reggie, said that one of the highlights of her career has been meeting so many people.

What motivates her every day is the positive difference she knows she makes in the lives of the people she supports.

"They just want to be loved and respected as we do," said Gwen. "If you have love in your heart, help support their needs, help them do what they want to do, it enriches their life and yours. A simple hug and a smile can brighten anyone's day."

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# FOCUS ON

## Back to the Community



CI Volunteers pick up surplus food from Wawa to deliver to local hunger relief agencies.

When the CI Day Program was closed during the initial pandemic lockdown in March 2020, all of the program's on-site activities at its Adult Day and Training Facility in Broomall, PA, were indefinitely suspended. Classes in art, dance, computer skills training, fitness and wellness, and a variety of others all stopped.

"What never stopped were community participation supports," said Barry Foster, CI's Director of Day Programs. "Everything we do now is community-based both in Pennsylvania and Delaware.

We have not been in our buildings at all."

At the onset of the pandemic, community participation supports were provided on a one-on-one basis, but as life returned to some normalcy the ratio of staff to participants slowly increased.

"We gradually started to open things up," said CI Program Facilitator Marcia Scott, who oversees the day-to-day operations in the PA Day Program. "Given their concerns, some parents weren't ready, but once people started getting vaccinated we slowly started to bring more people back out into the community fold."

Although people are still not out in group force, the PA and DE programs today provide community supports for about 20 individuals per program.

# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Raising the American Flag for CI DSPs

Established in 2008, National Direct Support Professional Recognition Week, this year held from September 12th to the 18th, is an opportunity to honor and spotlight the dedicated, innovative and vital contributions of the direct support workforce – the heart and soul of supports for people with disabilities in communities all across the country.

For Diane Hannah-Wilson, CI's Vice President of Human Resources, recognizing and celebrating CI's DSPs isn't relegated to one week of the year, but DSP Week provides her and the administrative team the chance to do something special. This year it had to be something more unique than anything done in the past based on the fact that as Diane said, "we can never forget this is the team of people who held it together during a time that none of us ever experienced."

"DSP Week is all about them. It's our way of saying thank you and recognizing the profession as just that – a true profession," said Diane. "It requires something that goes beyond skill, which is compassion and a sense of



Art classes resume with Linda Christiansen.

"The initial challenges we had revolved around getting folks back out into the community where safety was a concern," said Marcia. "Parents wanted to be assured that their loved ones were going to be safe and wanted to know how we were going to do that and still provide those services in the community."

With the biggest issue being safety, the CI Day Program team stocked up on PPE supplies and ensured that all the vehicles were sanitized before and after a day outing. They also focused on getting out more while the weather was nice and included a lot of health and wellness activities that took participants to parks, the mall for early morning walks, and basketball courts.

Volunteering makes up a large part of CI's community-based program. For many years now, Day Program participants have been regularly delivering meals for Meals on Wheels and MANNA, and volunteering with other services in the community.

Although volunteer opportunities were cut back during the pandemic, folks in Delaware continue to support Meals on Wheels, and in PA have been volunteering for Wawa delivering food to different shelters and services around Delaware County through the Food Donation Connection.

One of the biggest challenges the CI Day Program team faces is how to keep folks active in the community during the winter months. As Barry said, they are dealing with the challenges one day at a time and have slowly begun to reintroduce some of the classes that were cancelled during the shutdown. In October, art classes resumed at a community center in Media, PA, and are being conducted every Thursday and Friday by art teacher Linda Christiansen. In December, dance classes will start back up every Monday.

"We're hoping that we can fully open up again, but we're following ODP and CDC guidelines," said Marcia. "We've been pushing for community supports for a while now, for folks to build relationships and become more and more integrated into their communities. COVID has really pushed that along."



Marcia Scott at the board organizing group outings for the day.

# HAPPENINGS



Photo of Zulene Mayfield from the Monday, August 23rd edition of the Inquirer. Photo Credit: Jonathan Wilson, Philadelphia Inquirer.

This past August, CI DSP and longtime environmentalist and social justice leader Zulene Mayfield was featured in a Philadelphia Inquirer cover story about her 30-year crusade against a waste-to-energy plant in Chester, PA.

Zulene has tirelessly fought against polluting industry, noise and racism that has affected Chester. She founded Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, "long before the term 'environmental justice' became shorthand to describe the impact of heavy industry on low-income neighborhoods."

To read the full article, visit [www.inquirer.com/science/climate/zulene-mayfield-chester-county-coventa-environmental-justice-20210823.html](http://www.inquirer.com/science/climate/zulene-mayfield-chester-county-coventa-environmental-justice-20210823.html)

giving back to individuals and making their lives whole."

2021 has been an exceptionally challenging year on all counts, and in order to acknowledge how far above and beyond CI's DSPs went in their daily support of the men and women Community Interactions serves, Diane put together a committee and asked the question: "How can we, like no other time, say we recognize, we honor and we thank you for what you've done?"

"We had to make sure that we recognized the countless hours our DSPs spent in the homes, and those who were willing to work around the clock because we had people that were affected in so many different ways by the pandemic," Diane said.

Brainstorming how to make DSP Week that much more special this year, the second year in a row that staff couldn't come together to celebrate, Diane and the committee locked on the idea of giving CI's DSPs one of the highest honors that they could think of – raising and flying three American flags, one for each Community Interactions program in Central and Southeastern PA and Delaware, over the US Capital – a national honor.



DSP Week 2021: PA Representative Leanne Krueger presents Diane Hannah-Wilson and CI President and CEO Chris Saulino with the citation honoring CI's direct support workforce.

In addition, a citation was drafted and read on the floor of the US Congress by Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon, and in the Pennsylvania State Capital by local Representative Leanne Krueger, who visited CI during DSP week to present the citation. All three flags were delivered to CI and plans are for them to be encased along with the citation and put on display for all to see.

"How are we going to top this year's recognition celebration next year?" Diane asked. "The only thing I've got to do is try to get Oprah. That would be a 'drop the mic' moment."