



Community Interactions, Inc.  
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# Community Interactions

# connections

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Please choose CI as your charity on Amazon Smile!

**Having fun...**

Phillies Games, Jurassic Quest at the Oxford Valley Mall and many more are in the works. The team is planning exciting summer trips, that include the Philadelphia Zoo, the Adventure Aquarium and the Funplex in New Jersey, to name a few. The only stipulation is that staff take lots of photos. "We've always been ahead of the curve in providing community-based services," said Brooke. "We've always advocated for integration that helps people live their best lives and experience opportunities and activities in the community that most other people get to enjoy. Vacation season is upon us, and many of our residential individuals, in both PA & DE, look forward to getting away, going to the beach, sporting events and other adventures. This donation has really allowed us to do more of the enjoyable things that people don't necessarily get to do and gives people the chance to be out and active and make community connections. We are so very thankful!



John (left) and Kedar at the Philadelphia Auto Show this past March.

## Having Fun with a Little Help from Our Friends



(From left) Paul, Ben, Harry, DSP Breyon Plummer, and DeBerry having a magical day at Harry Potter The Exhibition.

Last year, CI had the great fortune of receiving a very generous gift, in the amount of \$50,000, from a family member whose sibling has been a longtime resident with the nonprofit. For the men and women CI supports that provides a heck of a lot of fun and enrichment opportunities to be sure.

The donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, gifted the princely sum with the stipulation that it be used to provide CI's residents with the chance to enjoy outings, recreational activities, vacations and entertainment that they could not otherwise afford, as well as training and technology, such as smart homes, that will allow individuals to become more independent and stay in their homes as they age. With COVID upending our lives these past few years, getting people out and about has been a challenge, to say the least, but an ongoing struggle and barrier to accessing community activities for CI's residents is just how much things cost.

"A lot of our folks are on fixed budgets which doesn't allow for outings and activities that are often so cost prohibitive," said Brooke Zanetich, Program Specialist, who has been working in CI's Day Program for the past eight years. "We like to gear those opportunities to low cost or free, and generally look for places that we might be able to get discount tickets to, if it's something people really want to do."

A donation committee was created to oversee how the generous gift is being used, and regular meetings are held to keep a tally of the fund and stretch it as far as possible as well as to ensure that CI is keeping track of every penny spent.

So far, CI staff, both day and residential have taken their groups on outings to see Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience, the Philadelphia Auto Show, The Harry Potter Exhibition at the Franklin Institute, [con't on back page](#)

### Our Mission:

Community Interactions, Inc. (CI) builds communities of compassion and inclusion for neurodiverse people through innovative services.



### Message from the CEO

Christopher Saulino, Ph.D.  
President/CEO

As we head into summer and peak vacation season, I can't help but reflect on my mother, Patricia Saulino, and her legacy of love for the people we support.

Beginning in the early days of CI until her passing in 2007, my mom staunchly advocated for our residents to be able to take vacation and experience the world outside of their communities. That advocacy lives on through the Patricia B. Saulino Memorial Fund established in 2008 to help give individuals a thrilling or leisurely getaway.

Since many of our residents don't have the financial means to be able to take vacations or access entertainment and recreational activities, we've come to rely on the generosity and support of donors, many of whom are staff, who go above and beyond every day.

All of CI's fundraising efforts go to support individuals and their needs and not the organization's operating budget. Our fundraising focus has always been on people – if someone wants to go to Disney World, we make it happen. If our residents need clothes or other necessities, we find a way to get them what they need. When Christmas rolls around, our amazing "angels" descend on the CI office, toting bags filled with wrapped gifts to ensure that no one goes without a present.

We recently received an extremely generous gift of \$50,000 (see this newsletter's cover story), that we are spending where it needs to be spent...on people and new, exciting experiences as well as needs. To ensure that our kind donors see the fruits of their generosity, we regularly update them with photos of how their gift is being spent and the men and women who are enjoying those fruits.

I know my mom would be extremely proud to see how her legacy lives on and delighted by the bigheartedness of people who generously give to make a difference in the lives of the people she cared about so deeply.

Wishing everyone a healthy and happy summer.

### Honoring CI Loved Ones and Friends

In Memoriam/Honor Gift

Enclosed is a gift of:

\$100  \$25  
 \$50  Other \$\_\_\_\_\_

This gift is:

In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_  
 In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
 For the occasion of: \_\_\_\_\_

Send the acknowledgment to:

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

This gift is given by:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
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740 South Chester Road  
Swarthmore, PA 19081

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- Meg Nielson, Director of Communication and Outreach / mnielson@ciinc.org

# PEOPLE

## Diane Hastings



Every morning, Diane Hastings heads down her street to the Chi Cafe, for breakfast and a hot cup of tea. As a Chichester native, who's lived in the town her whole life, she's well known among the locals, including business owners, bus drivers and crossing guards with whom she's been close for years. When her parents Wilma and Charles passed away in 2001 and 2003 respectively, the community rallied around her, and to this day keep an eye out for her.

A CI resident since 2007, Diane, 59, lives independently with her cat Rosie, and receives personal supports from DSP Jane Bostwick. Together since 2009, they are presently working on improving Diane's cooking skills and reading. Jane also helps Diane manage her finances, and you can often find the pair running errands or roaming the aisles of Booths Corner Farmers Market, shopping and stopping to chat with vendors.

Four years ago, Diane retired from her job as a janitor at Linwood Elementary School where she worked for 23 years. She said she's worked most of her adult life and began her training at Elwyn after graduating from Chichester High School.

Enjoying her retirement, Diane likes to keep busy with drawing, painting, and taking art classes; she's had some of her artwork selected to be made into CI birthday cards. As a sports fan, who loves the Phillies, Diane prides herself on being a longtime Special Olympian in bowling, and cheerleader for other Olympians.

Always willing to lend a helping hand, Diane has been a regular volunteer for Tim Tebow's Night to Shine, a cause close to her heart. Although COVID disrupted her volunteer efforts, she said she wants to do more.

## Larry Oruta



Other than a brief stint working for USPS in New Castle, DE, upon his arrival from Kenya with his young family in 1998, Larry Oruta, CI Senior Program Specialist, has dedicated his professional career in his adopted country to supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. June marks 11 years with CI.

What many may not know, is that prior to coming to the U.S., Larry taught biology for 16 years. He earned a bachelor's in science and a master's in zoology from the

Savitribai Phule Pune University in Pune, India. He also earned his teaching certification from Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

Coming to the U.S. through the Diversity Visa Lottery Program was like winning the Power Ball, he said. When he arrived with his wife Sophia and their two eldest children Wendy and Tiddy, they quickly worked to establish themselves, making education a priority for their children. Today Wendy is a dentist, and Tiddy is a Doctor of Pharmacy. They have two other children born here – Manny, who is attending DelTech, and Karen, a student at William Penn High School. Larry is very proud of his children's achievements and hard work. "They inspire me," he said.

To resume his teaching career, Larry needed additional certification. The process was discouraging, so he set his sights on working in human services, first with Chimes, then Keystone Human Service where he worked from 2007 to 2011, before joining CI.

"The longer I stayed in the field, the more my passion grew for working with people with disabilities," said Larry. "I still see myself as a teacher in many ways and that everything is for learning."

# FOCUS ON

## WRAPped up in Wellness



It's a WRAP! (Front row, from left) Aisha Rice, Bockarie Ellis, Lynn Miller, Emma Doyle, Larry Oruta, and Sepideh Motemavelian. (Back row, from left) Lebo Edge, Lee Horton, Anya Ricks, and Chris Lynn.

This past year, a group of eight CI staff members from across the agency participated in a two-part training seminar that as Christopher Lynn, CI's Operations Director for Programs and Services, said was an experience that bonded the team in unexpected ways.

That program, the Wellness Recovery Action Plan® or WRAP®, is a personalized prevention and wellness program centered on the principle of self-determination. WRAP, owned and administered by Advocates for Human Potential (AHP), was created 25 years ago in Vermont by Mary Ellen Copeland and a group of individuals with mental health challenges. It is designed to support an individual's goals and transform their lives in many areas. According to AHP's website, anyone can use it "to get well, stay well, and make their life the way they want it to be."

"WRAP has its roots in helping to keep people out of institutionalization," said Lynn Miller a Criminal Justice/WRAP Associate at AHP who co-facilitated the training seminars at CI. "There was a transition several decades ago when state hospitals were being closed and the program was used as a tool to help people support themselves and have others support them in maintaining community integration."

"CI's initial goal for the program was to be able to facilitate WRAP sessions

with the individuals we support," said Chris Lynn, "but what we found as we were going through the process of self-examination was that we gained a lot of perspective about ourselves. We also saw how it would benefit CI in setting Workplace Wellness goals."

The first WRAP seminar, held this past November over three days, was geared around developing one's own plan by going through a process of self-discovery. "It's like writing out a will," said Lynn. "You have a plan that helps you stay well, and if you slip and get sick or experience a crisis then there's a component that is used by people who support you, who honor your plan's wishes."

The second, a five-day seminar, conducted in February, involved training CI team members to become WRAP facilitators themselves. One of the biggest takeaways for Chris was how they started each day with a check in on how each person was feeling and what he or she was going to do to support themselves.

The seminars were co-facilitated with Lynn by Lee Horton, who with his brother Dennis were convicted and imprisoned for 28 years for a crime they did not commit. Their sentences were commuted a year ago February. The WRAP program, which they were both trained in while in prison, by Lynn, helped them get through severe anxiety and depression and each credit WRAP with their success at being granted commutation as it offered the tools to prepare and plan for a successful reentry.

"Lee's positive attitude after everything he's been through just had everyone in awe," Chris said. "His story was so compelling and so heart wrenching it put everyone's life in perspective. It was one of those life-changing experiences."

"The wellbeing of all our staff and the individuals we support is of the utmost importance," said CI CEO Christopher Saulino. "This was the best training program we've ever experienced."

Chris Lynn said that whatever his initial thoughts were, were blown out of the water at how much WRAP benefitted the team, and will benefit CI residents, and the agency as a whole.



Aisha Rice holding her Certificate of Achievement after completing WRAP training with Lynn Miller and Lee Horton.

# HAPPENINGS



Diane Hannah-Wilson, CI VP of Human Resources and Melanie Woods, CI HR Staffing Specialist (center, left and right) are flanked by Danielle Veltri and Keith Moore of EDSI-EARN at the PA Workforce Development Conference this past May.

We were so very proud to have Community Interactions receive the Governor's Achievement Employer Award this past May in Harrisburg. CI was nominated by Keith Moore at EDSI-EARN with whom they have a successful partnership in finding employment opportunities for a variety of people.

The award honoring CI reads: On behalf of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, this award recognizes your initiative and the leadership demonstrated by your organization in providing families with the opportunity to move towards self-sufficiency through employment.

# SPOTLIGHT ON

## A Passion for Puzzles



Every day after his custodial shift at the Media Courthouse, in Media, PA, Anthony Pio sets right to working on his jigsaw puzzles – sometimes two at a time. Over the course of the past two years, he has put together more than 50 puzzles ranging in size from one to three thousand pieces.

The hobby, he said, began with a few puzzles his mother Donna had given him just before she passed away in a nursing home in 2021. Anthony, 53, and a Darby



native, lived with his parents (his father Albert passed in 2016) until moving to his CI Morton home three years ago.

For Anthony, puzzles are a fun way to unwind for a few hours after being on his feet all morning, but studies have found that their benefit goes beyond relaxation. Puzzles, it turns out, are really good for the brain, improving cognition, visual-spatial reasoning, short-term memory, problem solving, productivity and mood. And, according to researchers from the University of Michigan, puzzles can help raise one's IQ by four points.

CI DSP Dwayne Amos, who works with Anthony, is impressed by his multitasking abilities. "I'll find him working on one puzzle one minute and then moving onto another the next," he said. For new puzzles the men head to Target or Walmart where Anthony picks them out himself.

What happens to the completed puzzles?

"I take pictures of them and then take them apart," said Anthony. "I donate them all to Goodwill so others can enjoy them."

(Photo far left) Anthony at work on one of his puzzles. (Photo left) A completed puzzle of cereal brands. The black and white photo doesn't do it colorful justice.