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Community Interactions

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Fall 2024

CI Smart Homes Empowering People



Melanie Yoho at home using her tablet. "This technology makes life easier."

Director of Operations, who several years ago was invited to join ODP's Technology Taskforce, and a subgroup that produces the quarterly newsletter "Technology Today," an online publication that promotes the many different uses of technology, from low-tech tools to high-tech devices.

For individuals with physical disabilities or limited mobility, tasks that might typically require assistance, such as adjusting the thermostat, turning lights or entertainment systems on and off, are now made possible through voice commands and smartphone or tablet apps. Devices like Amazon Alexa and Google Home are installed in various rooms of these CI smart homes, and are able to connect to and control other smart devices in the home such as smart plugs, lights, thermostats, and other devices. This allows residents to control their environment without needing to physically interact with switches or dials. This level of independence is a game-changer for individuals, like longtime resident and part-time CI Receptionist Melanie Yoho, who uses a wheelchair.

"It's very beneficial and makes me feel independent," said Melanie, describing her smart home. "It makes life a lot easier."

Melanie doesn't have to depend on staff to change the room temperature, or set an alarm. Small yet meaningful changes have made her more self-sufficient, helping her start her day, for example, by asking about the weather and planning her outfit accordingly.

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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

I hope you all had a very enjoyable summer. As we navigate through upcoming system changes, it's important to remember that Community Interactions' mission remains steadfast. We are dedicated to supporting individuals in our community, promoting community participation, supportive employment, and advocating for their rights. Our commitment to helping individuals build skills and achieve greater independence remains unwavering.

Adapting to these changes requires us to be proactive as an agency. Community Interactions has always embraced challenges head on, including those presented by Performance Based Contracting (PBC). These adjustments have not only enhanced our systems and operations but also improved our service quality.

We are expanding our offerings with enhanced family living services, introducing new models of supportive employment, and implementing an innovative Community Participation Model (CPS) to better serve individuals with disabilities. Agency-wide, we continue to refine and strengthen our quality assurance systems and bolster clinical supports for individuals with complex needs.

In addition, we are proud to announce the introduction of certification programs for our Direct Support Professionals and Frontline Supervisors. These initiatives aim to professionalize our workforce, elevate service quality, and enhance employee retention.

Our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) remains central to our organizational culture. It is integral to fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected. We are initiating a process to ensure that we fully embed this into our culture.

While our mission remains unchanged, how we achieve it continually evolves. Embracing change offers us opportunities to build upon our strengths, foster compassionate and inclusive communities, especially for neurodiverse individuals, and drive innovation. We look forward to a bright future, serving increasingly diverse populations and celebrating the richness that diversity brings.

Wishing you and your families a safe, warm and wonderful Holiday season ahead.

CI Smart Homes

CI's smart homes also come equipped with iPads for both residents and staff. Residents use these devices for communication with family, entertainment, and other daily tasks, while staff use them to record medication administration and document care, streamlining operations and ensuring that everyone is on the same page.

Beyond immediate in-home benefits, CI's smart home initiative includes exploring the use of remote support systems, allowing staff to assist residents virtually. "The idea is to give individuals more independence while still ensuring safety," Christopher said.

Remote support systems can help with everything from answering simple questions to dealing with more complex issues, like assessing whether someone at the door is a stranger or not.

Despite these advancements, Christopher is cautious about becoming overly reliant on technology. "We're in a profession where our goal is to work ourselves out of a job. We want people to take risks and learn from their failures, just like anyone else," he noted. This philosophy, known as the "dignity of risk," a phrase that he loves, underscores the balance between fostering independence and ensuring safety.

Ultimately, Christopher sees smart home technology as a means to empower people. "It's all about giving people control over their lives, making sure they have the freedom to live independently and safely."

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:

Name: _____

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This gift is given by:

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CI Newsletter Editor

- Emma Doyle, Director of Admissions and Marketing

PEOPLE

Crystal Conquest



This past August, Crystal Conquest, a Licensed Practical Nurse, marked her ten-year milestone with Community Interactions. With a passion for patient care, Crystal oversees the health and wellness of individuals in Cluster 1, collaborating closely with CI's Health and Wellness Administrators to ensure their needs are met.

Her role extends beyond basic healthcare as she actively assists in managing appointments, medications, and ensuring that medical paperwork is up to date. Crystal also makes regular wellness visits to her individuals, ensuring their overall well-being and providing support when needed.

Before joining the nonprofit, Crystal, who lives in Delaware County, gained experience in home care, assisted living, and long-term care, giving her a well-rounded background in the healthcare field. She studied nursing at ECPI University in Virginia Beach, Va., and the skills she developed there have been invaluable in her work.

Crystal's dedication to her work is driven by her love for the individuals she supports, whom she describes as "the highlight of her day, who make it all worthwhile." Her commitment is not only professional but also deeply personal, as she finds fulfillment in making a positive impact on their lives.

Outside of work, Crystal is a devoted mother and a young grandmother. She has four children, three daughters and a son, and recently welcomed her first grandchild, a grandson. Despite her busy schedule, she enjoys spending her free time with her family, especially cherishing moments with her grandson.

Celebrating her 10th anniversary with CI, Crystal looks forward to continuing her meaningful work, drawing joy and purpose from her interactions with both her colleagues and the amazing individuals she supports.

Brooke Zanetich



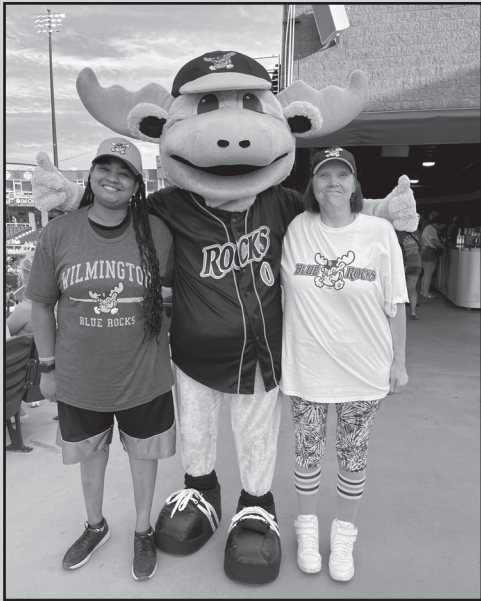
Brooke Zanetich has dedicated nearly two decades to the human services field, currently serving as a Senior Program Specialist for CI Residential Services. In this role, Brooke oversees six residences, ensuring that the health, safety, and overall well-being of the individuals supported in those homes are met. Prior to this, she was a Program Specialist for the Day Program, marking a significant evolution in her career since starting at Community Interactions nine years ago.

Prior to joining CI, Brooke worked as an Intake Coordinator at Crozer Chester Medical Center's Children's Mental Health Department for seven years. She graduated from Newman University in 2005, with a bachelor's in liberal arts and minors in criminal justice and psychology. She briefly pursued a nursing degree after graduating, but as she said, "life took over." Brooke's commitment to helping others stems from her personal experiences growing up with a sister who has intellectual disabilities. This lifelong exposure to disability advocacy continues to influence her work today.

Outside of work, Brooke, who grew up in Upland, Pa., is a devoted mother of three, including 15-year-old fraternal twins, a boy and a girl, and a 20-year-old daughter attending Widener University. Her weekends are filled with her children's sports activities — primarily softball and football. She lives in Ridley Park, where she has resided for 14 years with her husband, Dan. Together, they recently celebrated 24 years as a couple and 21 years of marriage.

Brooke's passion for her work lies in building meaningful connections with the individuals she supports. She thrives on making their lives better, striving to make them "safe, healthy, and happy," which gives her a sense of fulfillment. Her strong commitment to person-centered supports reflects her belief in the importance of empowering individuals to make decisions about their own lives. "It's about them."

FOCUS ON
Celebrating a Season of Community and Fun



Sara (left) and Diane with Rocky Bluewinkle, the mascot for the Wilmington Blue Rocks. The ladies attended a few ballgames with Jane Troppman this summer.

This past summer, CI individuals enjoyed a range of exciting activities aimed at enhancing their well-being, providing opportunities for community involvement, and ensuring they have plenty of fun. After a period of restrictions due to the pandemic, this summer also marked a happy return of CI's Quality Enhancement (QE) program whose members began gathering on the last Wednesday of each month to organize outings and activities.

One of the highlights over the summer was a series of barbecues the group organized hosted at various residential locations. These gatherings brought individuals together from different homes, creating an enjoyable social atmosphere.

Besides barbeques, trips and excursions play a significant role in the QE group's planning. Their annual trip to Atlantic City is eagerly anticipated and typically occurs in the cooler months of late summer or early fall, allowing them to enjoy the beach while avoiding the intense summer heat.

"We always want to make sure our individuals are participating in the community so that they can be valued members of the community," said Aisha Rice, a CI Associate Director of Residential Services. "When they're out and participating they are living normal functioning lives like everyone else."

Other CI family members enjoyed multiple sporting events, including the WWE Summer Slam, with some holding season tickets to the Phillies, 76ers, and Philadelphia Union. Several individuals from CI Central PA came down for a few of those

Phillies games. In addition to sporting events, individuals made trips to parks and gardens, including Longwood, libraries, and farmers markets, to name a few.

CI DSP Jane Troppman attended several ball games with Diane Hastings and Sara Hudson, including Phillies and Wilmington Blue Rocks games. They also celebrated the 30th anniversary of "The Lion King" with a viewing at a local movie theater.

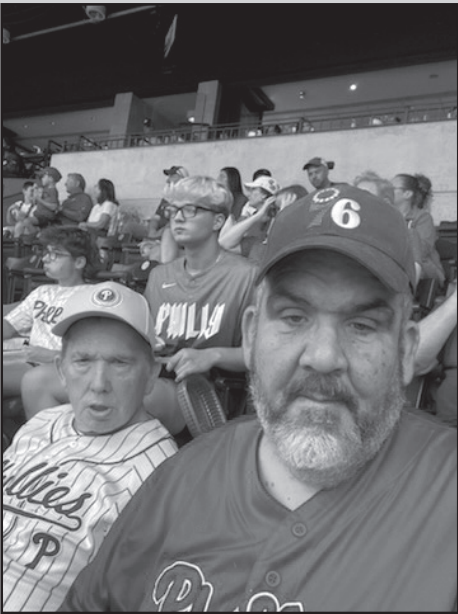
One resident, shared Aisha, enjoyed a staycation, staying local while relaxing for few days at a hotel with a pool and exercise facilities.

Although most residents fund their own fun, for those who have difficulty affording a small vacation or outing, there is the Patricia B. Saulino Memorial Fund, which was established in 2007 to honor the life and memory of Patricia "Pat" Saulino, wife of CI Founder, Gerry Saulino. Contributions to this fund not only help to keep Pat's memory alive, but also continue her legacy of improving the quality of life for CI individuals.

Like for everyone, summer is a time for the people CI supports to enjoy themselves, maintain active lives, and connect with others.

"As I've always said, it's indicative of what our name is — Community Interactions. We want our individuals out in the community interacting with people and living meaningful, fulfilling lives."

Top Photo: Kenny (left) and Joseph taking in a Phillies game this summer. Bottom Photo: Lynne (left) and Serena enjoying a day at Longwood Gardens.



HAPPENINGS



This past July, CI Day Program participants from Delaware (above) and South Eastern PA, along with staff got creative at 'Painting with a Twist,' showcasing their artistic talents while building community bonds.

CI Virtual Health & Safety Week
Week of October 21, 2024
Daily CI Basket Raffle

Annual CI All-Agency Holiday Party
Thursday, December 12, 2024, 6 to 10 p.m.
The Waterfall, 3416 Philadelphia Pike, Claymont, DE

The Season of Giving
This Giving Season, we invite you to support CI by donating, volunteering, or sharing our mission with others to help us continue making a positive impact in the lives of the people we support. To make a donation, visit www.ciinc.org and click on the Donate Button, or "Text to Give" #CIi to 269-89

SPOTLIGHT ON
Honoring Dedication at CI's Milestone Awards

Last December, Community Interactions held its annual Milestone Awards celebration luncheon to recognize the achievements and commitment of employees who have dedicated many years of service to the organization. The event, led by Vice President of Human Resources Diane Hannah-Wilson and coordinated by Renée Sutton, CI's Human Resources & Fiscal Administrative Assistant, with support from the HR Team, highlighted CI's ongoing dedication to honoring its staff and fostering a culture of appreciation and community.

The celebration, held at the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, recognized employees who have been with CI for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 years, and beyond. Each year CI recognizes these milestones with a token of appreciation. Employees with five and ten years of service received gifts such as a lapel pin and cap or a pen and pencil set. Those reaching 15-year milestones and beyond were honored with gifts that became more distinguished as the years of service climbed — a glass plate trimmed in gold for 15 years, a clear plate with a charger for 20, a silver-trimmed plate for 25, and a clock for those reaching 30 years. Employees who have been with CI for 35 to 40 years were awarded a commemorative watch, signifying their long-standing contributions to the organization.

CI's leadership team, including CEO Dr. Christopher Saulino, former CFO and Senior VP



Among the CI Milestone Awards celebrants, from left, were Henry Njenga, Beatrice Jacobs Ngateh, Todd Short, Gwendolyn Murray, Caroline George, Winnifred M. Barbu, Andoria Starkie, Michael Parke, Bockarie Ellis, Tearra Newell, Marcia Scott, Tamika Reaves, and Janene Bowman.

Gary Clift, and Diane Hannah-Wilson, were on hand to present the awards. Their participation underscored the company's commitment to valuing and recognizing its employees.

In addition to the Milestone Awards celebration, CI also hosted its All-Agency Meeting this past May. This year's theme was "Reunited." "The meeting was an opportunity for employees and individuals to reconnect, share in the agency's vision, and participate in fun activities," said Renée. Highlights included raffles and prizes, a 360-degree photo booth, and the introduction of "Painting with a Twist," which was offered as a gift to programs at the meeting, providing employees and individuals with an opportunity to engage in creative projects at a later time.

CI continues to foster a culture of appreciation and gratitude, recognizing the vital role that employees play in advancing its mission. By celebrating their milestones and fostering a sense of community, the organization ensures that its staff remains motivated, appreciated, and connected to the broader vision. This commitment to employee recognition is a cornerstone of CI's success and an important part of its mission to champion both its employees and the individuals they support.