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Community Interactions connections

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Journey of Independence Through Employment



Jason Jones has been a valued employee at Giant since 2001.

For Greg Artley and Jason Jones, work is more than a job—it's a pathway to independence, purpose, and inclusion. These two longtime residents of CI's Elm Drive home in Central Pennsylvania have built fulfilling lives through steady employment in their community, supported by dedicated staff and a strong belief in their capabilities.

Greg, 58, has worked for over a decade at the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PLCB) and at a local facility known as the BRC. He performs housekeeping tasks such as cleaning restrooms, vacuuming, and taking out the trash. His house manager, Todd Short, who has supported both men since the Elm Drive home opened in 2001, describes Greg as “a very efficient worker who takes pride in keeping things

clean and tidy.” Despite being fully deaf, Greg thrives in his work with the support of a job coach from Living Unlimited who checks in weekly.

Jason, 49, has been with Giant Food Stores since 2001. In the produce department, he preps fruits and vegetables, assembles salads, and stocks the shelves. Though deaf and blind in one eye due to CHARGE syndrome, Jason is independent in his job and only occasionally needs a job coach to help with new assignments. “He enjoys his job and shows up ready to work each day,” says Todd. “He knows exactly what he's doing.”

Todd has witnessed the impact of employment on both men over the years. “They're not just working—they're growing,” he says. “Jason has taken to reading the news online and has become really interested in politics and current events. Their communication skills have improved, and they've become more confident.”

Beyond the paycheck, Todd says the jobs give Greg and Jason a sense of belonging. “They feel like everyone else. Working helps them feel connected to the world around them. It gives them purpose.”

CI's President and CEO, Christopher Saulino, sees stories like Greg and Jason's as a model

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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

At Community Interactions, our mission has always been to support individuals in gaining greater independence and autonomy. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through employment. A job provides more than just a paycheck—it brings purpose, confidence, and identity.

CI is committed to expanding our support for individuals ready to enter the workforce. We believe supported employment is a clear pathway to independence. That's why we're integrating supported employment services into our residential programs. When a person's support team identifies employment as a goal, job coaches will assist with skill-building, job searching, and on-site support.

With the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation struggling to meet growing demand for job support services, CI is stepping in to help individuals access resources faster. Our integrated model is unique—it allows individuals to work with residential staff who know them and are invested in their success. This familiarity can make all the difference in helping someone secure and maintain meaningful employment.

One of CI's core values is supporting individuals as they grow their skills and independence. We begin by meeting each person where they are, building on their strengths as they transition into our residential programs. Progress may take months or years—but we have the patience and dedication to walk that journey with them.

We know it can be difficult for families and stakeholders when progress isn't immediately visible. But we celebrate small wins because we understand that independence is built one step at a time. These victories accumulate into life-changing accomplishments.

There is no greater reward than seeing someone achieve their goals after years of hard work. These moments are deeply meaningful and speak to the heart of why we do what we do. The joy and transformation we witness every day fuel our passion.

To our entire CI family: thank you for your commitment and support. Wishing everyone a safe and wonderful summer.

CI Employment

for the organization's new employment initiative launching this summer. “We're embedding job coaching into our residential teams,” Saulino explains. “The staff who know the individuals best will help them find and keep jobs. This creates stronger relationships, better advocacy, and a more sustainable support model.”

But Saulino is quick to emphasize that employment is about more than economic opportunity. “A parent once told me her son could go out and have a beer with friends after work—that he was just one of the guys. She cried. And I cried too,” he recalls. “That's what we're trying to create—meaningful lives. It's not just about earning a paycheck. It's about connection, community, and the feeling that you matter.”

Greg and Jason's decades-long commitment to their jobs is a testament to what people with disabilities can achieve when given the chance—and the right support. Their story reminds us that employment isn't just about work. It's about dignity, independence, and the joy of being part of something bigger.

Support our Mission to Make a Difference

We invite you to support CI by donating, volunteering, or sharing our mission with others to help us continue making a positive and meaningful impact in the lives of the many individuals we support.

To find out about ways you can support Community Interactions, access the QR code below, or visit www.ciinc.org and click on “Support” in the menu. “Text to Give” #CII to 269-89



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PEOPLE

Denyae Jones



Denyae Jones has been a vital presence at CI Delaware since 2007, though her journey in human services began even earlier. Starting in 2005 as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) in a residential home, she steadily advanced to management and later took the lead in launching CI Delaware's day program, where she now serves as Program Facilitator.

With more than two decades of experience in healthcare and human services, Denyae's dedication is deeply rooted in personal fulfillment and community impact. She finds joy in watching individuals grow—from struggling with daily tasks to thriving in supportive, inclusive environments. "It's fulfilling," she shares, "seeing someone build genuine relationships in the community, not just because they have a disability, but because they belong."

Her program blends structured care with dynamic community involvement, with about 70% of activities taking place outside the facility. Recent highlights include a weeklong "Spirit Week" and a joyful Spring Fling celebration that even brought in local library staff, illustrating the strong community ties she fosters.

A Delaware native from New Castle, Denyae balances her professional life with motherhood. She has twin sons, Andre and Adrian, who just graduated from Odessa High School, and a daughter, Aniya, currently studying elementary education at the University of Delaware.

When she's not coordinating programs or supporting her family, Denyae enjoys being in nature, dancing, and reading. Passionate and humble, she's the quiet force behind a program that's changing lives—one connection at a time.

Christina Shimer



Christina Shimer brings passion, dedication, and heart to her role as Team Facilitator for Community Interactions Central PA. Her journey with the organization began in 2010 as a Direct Support Professional through an agency, and by 2012, she became a full-time CI employee. Since then, she's steadily risen through the ranks, acquiring many hats along the way, to now overseeing daily operations across six group homes, with another home under construction.

Christina's responsibilities are wide-ranging and include staff scheduling, medication training, financial oversight, licensing compliance, and even health and wellness coordination for residents. With certification as a Med Trainer through Penn State, she also leads staff training and medication observations.

Originally from North Carolina's Outer Banks, Christina moved to Pennsylvania at 18 with her parents, but not before obtaining CNA licensing. Her career has spanned nursing care, job coaching, and administrative roles, but human services is where her heart truly lies. "This field allows me to be who I am," she says. "I don't have to pretend. I get to bring my creativity, organization, and compassion to work every day."

Outside of work, Christina is a proud mother of three and grandmother of five with another grandchild soon on the way. She enjoys traveling to visit family, playing in a local pool league, and upcycling furniture. She lives in Lebanon with her partner Chris and their spirited dog, Mello.

Christina's drive, warmth and commitment have made her a pillar of support not only for her team and residents—but for their families as well.

FOCUS ON

The Vital Promise of Home: Aging in Place at CI



Longtime friends and housemates (from left) Edward, Aaron, and Jack recently moved together to their new, more accesible home on Roberta Rd. "They've stayed together like a family," said Parke, who has known the gentlemen for as long as she's been with CI.

For adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), the idea of "home" is far more than a street address—it's a sanctuary of routine, relationships, and the dignity of continuity. It's where trust is built, daily rhythms are understood, and where life's chapters unfold with the comfort of consistency. At CI, this belief is woven into every aspect of support, from how homes are selected to how the final moments of life are honored.

Few people understand this better than Joanne Parke, a registered nurse who has spent 26 years walking alongside residents in CI's group homes. She has witnessed young adults become elders, not by moving from place to place, but by growing old in the same familiar surroundings. "We have made a commitment... to only purchase properties that are accessible," Parke says. "Every newer home is step-free and outfitted so bathrooms can be remodeled into roll-in, low-threshold showers as needs change."

This proactive approach to home design means CI's residents are able to stay in the place they know. Many of the people Parke first cared for in her early years at CI are still in the same homes. Over time, CI's maintenance team has modified these spaces—widening doorways, installing shower chairs, and adjusting layouts—all to meet residents' changing physical needs. "Physically, we can accommodate people as they become less mobile," she says.

But creating a true home goes beyond accessible design. CI also embeds vital health services directly into each residence. Medicare-covered support such as physical, occupational, and speech therapy happens in the living room, not a hospital. After an illness or surgery, outside nurses visit as an added layer of care. "We look at it as an additional layer of nursing services," Parke explains. "It's temporary support, but it plays a powerful role in helping people recover at home."

And when recovery isn't possible, CI continues to uphold its core value: home is where life should be lived—and ended—with grace. Instead of institutional settings, hospice teams come into the home, allowing residents to spend their final days where they are most known and loved. "My goal for everybody is to get them to the finish line... without them having to leave their home," says Parke.

CI's commitment extends to its support staff as well. Many face the death of a resident for the first time. Hospice counseling and CI-led debriefings support these workers through the grieving process while they continue to provide steady, compassionate care.

From thoughtful renovations to bedside farewells, aging in place at CI reflects something deeper: unwavering respect. "Aging in place... is really about human dignity," Parke says.

"The people we support aren't interchangeable - you don't just pull them out of this house and plug them into that house. These are people. This is their life."

HAPPENINGS



This spring, CI resident and part-time receptionist Melanie Yoho, pictured here with President and CEO Christopher Saulino, was honored for her 30 years as the President of CI's Self-advocates - an anniversary milestone deserving of a sweet celebration.



CI Delaware held its annual Spirit Week this past April 14th to 18th. Each day was marked by a different theme. Here Eagles fans (from left) Randy, Josh, and Support Staff member Alonzo celebrate Sports Day.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Model of Care: Meet CI's Newest Nurses

CI's commitment to quality and proactive healthcare continues to grow with the addition of two outstanding nurses to its dedicated team. Brittany Gledhill and Melina Lenzi joined the organization nearly two years ago and are already leaving their mark—bringing compassion, professionalism, and a collaborative spirit to the individuals and staff they support. Their arrival signals the continuing evolution of a nursing model that prioritizes preventative care, personal relationships, and clinical excellence.

The cluster-based nursing model, first conceptualized over a decade ago, has steadily grown to meet rising clinical needs. Each cluster is assigned a full-time Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), a structure that now supports three full-time nurses with a fourth hire in progress.

"We responded to what families were looking for—nurses on staff who were familiar, accessible, and actively involved," said Ed Dover, CI's Director of Quality and Incident Management. "The result has been a much more proactive system."



CI's newest LPNs Melina Lenzi (left) and Brittany Gledhill.

Brittany Gledhill, who supports Cluster 2 in Delaware County, came to CI after working in a hectic rehab setting. She found the agency's team-oriented culture to be a welcome change. "It's very rewarding and flexible," she said. "I really enjoy it here, and I plan to stay for the long term." Her workdays alternate between administrative tasks and home visits where she connects with individuals and staff. "The better you know someone, the better you can care for them," she emphasized.

Melina Lenzi, who manages Clusters 3 and 4, brings the same passion to her role. With a caseload of over 50 individuals across 24 homes, she's found success by dividing her time strategically between the clusters. "There's real collaboration here," she noted. "It's not just about procedures—it's about relationships." Reflecting on the broader importance of her work, Melina added, "These individuals are just like us—they just communicate differently. We can all do more to understand and support them."

Together with veteran nurse Crystal Conquest, who oversees Cluster 1, and RN Consultant Joanne Parke, Brittany and Melina form the backbone of CI's nursing team. Dover praised their dedication: "They've exceeded expectations in both initiative and commitment. The decision to invest in this model has absolutely paid off."

As CI looks to hire a fourth nurse to complete the team, the foundation of care, connection, and clinical integrity continues to grow stronger—one relationship at a time.