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Summer Celebration in Central PA



CI Central PA housemates Miranda (left) and Denine are all smiles at the BBQ blowout on August 6th.

After two years, almost to the day, CI Central PA got to finally celebrate the opening of its new offices in Hershey, Pennsylvania, with a BBQ blowout. Why the delay? COVID of course.

Central PA has plenty to celebrate these days besides the belated grand opening of its hub of operations. All of its five residences in Dauphin, Lebanon and Lycoming Counties that support 11 individuals are almost fully staffed, quite a feat during a national DSP crisis and pandemic.

“We have gained some great new employees,” said Christina Shimer, CI Central PA Team Facilitator. “Over the course of the past two years we’ve taken a lot of time to do team building, and our staff in our homes have really become

strong teams who consistently help each other out.”

CI’s trademark has always been that it’s a family organization which includes staff and the people they support.

“Although Central PA is down the road a bit, they’re still part of the CI family,” said Christopher Lynn, CI’s Director of Operations. “They in and of themselves are a very cohesive unit, so when we had an opportunity to have a family BBQ, we jumped at it.”

Organized events and celebrations are regularly held at all CI locations, but they usually entail staff donning aprons and working the grills. This time round, the Central PA team set up a small planning committee and decided to have their celebration catered.

“Catering the event meant that we could all spend more time interacting with each other,” said Christopher. “We’ve been



Christopher Lynn, CI Director of Operations, celebrates with Central PA resident Debra.

con’t on back page

Our Mission:

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

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Central PA

meaning to do this for years, and with the new office opening, we were never able to do a proper housewarming event. We invited everyone to join in the fun.”

The event, held on Saturday, August 6th, a beautiful day as Christina described it, was catered by Mission Barbecue, who presented a feast of pulled pork, brisket, mac and cheese and cookie treats. Yard games included ladder ball, corn hole, and a giant soccer ball. Music was provided by a DJ whose bubble machine blew out bubbles all day long over the merrymakers.

“We invited all the individuals we support, their families, staff and their families. It was a nice event that everyone enjoyed,” Christina said.

The BBQ blowout, like all the events they plan every season, provides individuals the opportunity to gather together at one time to socialize and build friendships, Christina noted. It also gives team members a time to bond and relax.

“It’s just a way for us to unwind, appreciate and thank everybody for what they do,” said Christina

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PEOPLE

Greg Artley



With three part-time custodial jobs, CI Central PA resident Greg Artley is a busy man. Work, however, isn't his only passion, he also likes to make the most of his free time. You can say he works hard and plays hard.

Greg was born profoundly deaf and diagnosed with autism at an early age. Born in Hughesville, PA, he grew up an army brat, living in Georgia and Wisconsin where his father, who was in the military, was assigned, and then back

to Pennsylvania, where his parents re-settled in 2001. Sadly, his mother passed away before the pandemic. His father and brother live close by and they get together every Sunday.

A CI resident since 2008, Greg, 55, shares a home with two housemates in Hughesville. His three jobs at the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board, YWCA and a company called BRC keep him occupied Monday through Friday. The money he earns he saves mostly for excursions and vacations to the Jersey shore, his favorite destination. It's not so much the beach that he enjoys, but more the liveliness of the boardwalks.

Among his favorite activities is going to his local Hooters, where he says he enjoys the food. He also likes going to flea markets and getting out to different events. In his spare time at home, he likes to draw by hand or with a computer software program. He also loves solving puzzles. Give him a Rubik's Cube and he'll have it done in minutes. Oh, and football. He loves talking about football.

Joseph Sebli



For Joseph Sebli, his experience working at CI for the past 21 years has re-shaped his life and his attitude. It's given him a whole new perspective on what it means to live and of the blessings and opportunities that we have.

Joseph came to the U.S. from Liberia in 2000. He first briefly lived in New York, then New Jersey, and finally settled in Collingdale, Pennsylvania, where his wife Angela and daughter Josephine later joined him. In a short time, Joseph

began working at CI as a DSP. He came armed with a bachelor's in religion with a minor in business administration from Andrews University's international branch in Lagos, Nigeria, and then obtained an MBA from the University of Phoenix.

From DSP, Joseph moved into a new role in accounts payable, then became budget analyst, and today is CI's Payroll Administrator.

"I take my work very seriously," said Joseph. "I respect everybody and try as much as possible to work with everyone. I like to encourage people."

As an elder at the Havertown Seventh-day Adventist Church, faith is central in Joseph's life. It is what has guided him on his journey in the U.S. "It's been a blessing to me growing up here, from being a young man in his early 30s to who I am today," he said.

Joseph has been inspired by the people CI supports and grateful for the experience, he said. "It just keeps me going to see our individuals making every effort to work and live their daily lives meaningfully."

FOCUS ON

iPad Training Helps CI Residents Connect



Linda Christiansen with Kyle during an iPad training session.

In early 2021, CI was fortunate to receive funds through The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to purchase 75 iPads for its residential homes. With the pandemic keeping residents isolated, the iPads were the perfect communication tools for them to stay better connected with family, friends, and support teams.

Although a major boon to residents, it was soon

discovered that the iPads, which were rolled out to all the homes along with usage guidelines, were being underutilized, and so it was determined that many residents would benefit from training on how to get the most out of the devices. Enter Linda Christiansen.

Linda, who owns DelcoTechs, a PC and network solutions company, and Sillynut.com, a program that offers art and computer instruction for youth and adults with developmental disabilities and autism, is a very familiar face at CI. In 2015, she was brought on as an art teacher and computer trainer for the Day Program and has been working with the nonprofit ever since.

With her expertise in technology and passion for CI's mission,

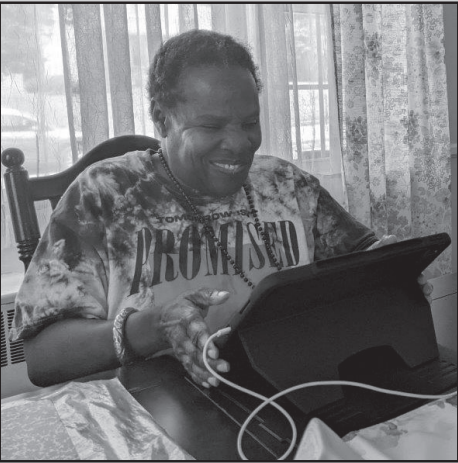
Linda was the easy choice to lead the iPad training initiative funded by a generous donor. To coordinate the training, Linda met with Meg Nielson, CI's Director of Communication and Outreach; Bill Merryfield, CI Behavioral Specialist; Michael Parke, IT Assistant; and Christopher Lynn, Director of Operations.

The team identified several individuals to be the first trainees, and early this past summer Linda began meeting with residents on a weekly basis, and now sometimes twice a week. So far about 20 individuals have had the training.

Linda spends between one and two hours with each resident and follows up with another visit two or three weeks later. She shows them what the iPad can do, how to Facetime and text with friends and family, how to use the search engines Safari or Google, how to take pictures, and how to find them.

She also takes the opportunity to promote her art class, and has recruited a few CI residents to attend. With the Day Program still closed, Linda is now conducting art classes at the Middletown Township Roosevelt School Community Center in Media.

"The iPad training initiative has been a nice experience for me, because it's giving me the opportunity to get to know the residents, and gain insight into what would catch their attention using the iPads," said Linda. "They get really excited that they are having a visitor, and that the visitor is interested in the things they're interested in."



Anita is excited to be learning new skills on her iPad.

HAPPENINGS



The CI Delaware team dedicated this year's Walk for Autism, held on Oct. 8th at Fort Delaware, in memory of Scott Humphreys, a CI resident who passed in 2015.

The annual Walk for Autism organized by Autism Delaware has special importance for former CI board member and Delaware resident, Sue Humphreys. The walk had been something she'd planned to do with her son Scott, a longtime CI resident, and it was one of his goals in his Essential Lifestyle Plan. But it never came to be, and on June 20th of 2015, Scott passed away at the age of 41.

SPOTLIGHT ON

An All Access Pass



Imagine the thrill of walking through the players' tunnel of the Linc on to the Eagles' home field, music blaring. On August 24th, a group of about 25 CI Day Program participants along with staff got to experience just that. With an All Access Pass, the group got the full behind-the-scenes tour of Lincoln Financial Field – a complete visual of what the players and fans can see when they're in the stadium.

"If you weren't an Eagles fan that

day, you became one," said Stephon Chatfield, CI Program Specialist at the PA Day Program, who with Marcia Scott, Day Program Operations Manager, organized the groups and day's event. The tour was made possible by former Day Program employee, Russell Garrow.

The private stadium tour lasted two and a half hours and included the concourse, the field, Eagles locker room, team tunnel, and post-game Eagles interview room. It also included the press box, the broadcast booth, and the state-of-the-art sensory room, which the Eagles collaborated with CHOP to create for families impacted by autism.

"Nobody lost interest. Everybody was engaged that day," Stephon said. "I think it was really because it was something out of the norm for them."

"Our individuals are very routine oriented, and this experience took them out of it in a good way," continued Stephon. "I thought it was a fantastic opportunity as a learning tool for the staff and management because we got to see a lot of different abilities we don't normally see. Seeing things they only see on TV had a tremendous effect on them. I could tell by their emotion."

(Photo far left) Justin, Ben and Kedar on the field of the Linc. (Photo right) The CI group gather for a photo in Pepsi Plaza of Lincoln Financial Field.

