



## OPPORTUNITIES for INCLUSION

*A New Name and a Bright Future*

Formerly GWArc

# OPPORTUNITIES for INCLUSION NEWS

July 2021

**See Inside!**

**Staff & Other  
Updates**

**Direct Care Staff:  
Working During  
the COVID-19  
Pandemic**

**Spotlight on  
Adult Family  
Care**

**Good News Story  
Moving to  
Independent  
Employment**

**Community  
Service  
During the  
Pandemic**

**Celebrating  
Diversity!**

**Program  
Happenings**

**And More!**



Opportunities for  
Inclusion is an affiliate of  
The Arc of the U.S. and  
The Arc of MA.

## From Gabriel Vonleh, Chief Executive Officer

Hello! We hope you and your families are doing well!

As we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and regain some normalcy, we are pleased to update you on what's been happening at Opportunities for Inclusion.

It has been a challenging year, and I am grateful to our amazing and dedicated staff, some of whom are pictured at right, for their commitment to Opportunities for Inclusion and the individuals in our programs throughout this difficult time. Examples of our staff's caring and commitment are numerous—one notable example is that some staff members volunteered to schedule and drive individuals in our programs to vaccine appointments when needed. See inside for heartfelt staff comments on why they continued to work during the pandemic.

Our day programs are fully open to all individuals who are ready to return in person, with COVID-19 safety protocols and equipment that is still needed in place. Our Virtual Day Program is continuing for individuals who are not yet ready to return. We expect that participants in our Group Supported Employment (GSE) program, who work at Brandeis and Bentley universities, will return to work for the Fall semester. Our Recreation Program, which became fully virtual, will return to in-person activities in the months ahead. Adult Family Care (AFC) and Independent Supported Employment (ISE) programs operated throughout the pandemic.

We were recently approved by the MA Department of Developmental Services for two new programs: **In-Home Supports** and **Placement Services/Shared Living**. In-Home Supports provides services that enable an individual to live independently, such as assisting with financial skills, medical appointments, shopping and social/community activities. Placement Services/Shared Living is a supported living arrangement that pairs individuals with provider families who welcome them into their homes, ensuring the needs of the individual are always met and that he/she is a valued member of the home. Please be in touch to learn more about these programs, or if you have any questions or comments.



*Happy to be fully open! Direct care staff members in our Day Habilitation Program are enthusiastic as they gather outside our Chestnut Street building before participants arrive.*

With humility and respect,

  
Gabriel Vonleh, MHA  
Chief Executive Officer

## Staff & Other Updates

### **Congratulations to Rhonda Fleming, Case Manager, for 25 years** of working at



Opportunities for Inclusion! Rhonda celebrated this milestone anniversary on May 6, 2021.

*"I have worn many hats, learned a lot and grown over the years!" Rhonda said recently.*

Rhonda Fleming, pictured at left with Gabriel Vonleh, CEO, celebrates 25 years of employment in May.

### **Congratulations to Mary Leo, Quality Assurance Case Coordinator, who celebrated 34 years** of working at

Opportunities for Inclusion on October 15, 2020!

As Mary says, this is not a job, but is caring for her other family.

Mary values being part of a team of staff members who are truly dedicated.



Mary Leo accepts a gift in recognition of 34 years of employment in October.

### **Thank You to our Wonderful Nurses! National Nurses Week** was May 6-May 12.

We are proud to recognize them for all they do: Day Habilitation - Christine Dressler, RN, Coordinator of Health Services; AFC Program - Barbara Dunker, RN, AFC Program Director; Kathy Augustini, RN, AFC Program Nurse; and Joann Corbelle, RN, AFC Program Nurse.

### **Open Positions at Opportunities for Inclusion**

Do you enjoy helping people? Do you want to leave work every day knowing you have made a positive difference in the lives of others? If so, consider joining us at Opportunities for Inclusion, where every day is an opportunity to make a difference and enrich the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The following positions are open at Opportunities for Inclusion. **Interested candidates can find more details on our website at: [oppsforinclusion.org/career-opportunities/](https://oppsforinclusion.org/career-opportunities/). To apply, please email a cover letter and resume to [admin@oppsforinclusion.org](mailto:admin@oppsforinclusion.org).**

- **Director of Employment, Community Based Day Supports and Transitions**
- **Community Based Day Supports Case Managers**
- **Day Habilitation Case Manager**
- **Day Habilitation Assistants**
- **Group Supported Employment (GSE) Site Supervisor**

Please share these open positions with people you know who may be interested!

### **Thank You!**



At left, Susan B., a participant in our CBDS Program, models a mask while posing with her sister, Lisa Wolfe. Our thanks to Lisa for making and donating 200 colorful cloth masks for our participants.

At right, members of the Massachusetts National Guard deliver Personal Protective Equipment provided by MEMA to our Chestnut Street building prior to our reopening last August. Gabriel Vonleh, CEO, is pictured at right.





## Direct Care Staff: Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, we shut down our on-site programs for several months, following the state's mandate and with concern for the health and safety of the vulnerable population we serve and our dedicated staff. We reopened to a small number of individuals in late summer 2020, and slowly increased capacity.

We are grateful to our amazing staff, who remained committed to the agency and the individuals in our programs throughout this time.

Recently, direct care staff members shared some thoughts about why they continued working at Opportunities for Inclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic:

*"I love our participants and I enjoy my job. I feel I am making a difference in each of their lives. And by me working it makes the participants feel we can still have some normalcy."*

*"I'm working because I'm close with several of our participants."*

*We know each other well and when we were apart, we missed one another, so coming back to work was an easy decision. They help me stay positive and upbeat in my life!"*

*"I serve because our participants need the services Opportunities for Inclusion provides. I find joy in serving them. I am dedicated because I really enjoy seeing progress emotionally and physically in our participants."*

*"Especially during these uncertain times, I feel it's important that we maintain a sense of togetherness and stability for our individuals who often face many changes throughout their lives, much of which they have little control over."*



Day Habilitation Program room shortly after reopening.

## Spotlight on Adult Family Care (AFC)

Our Adult Family Care (AFC) team members provided telehealth visits throughout the pandemic, and recently resumed visiting members and their caregivers in their homes. We currently support 52 caregivers and individuals, and meet with all families at least once monthly to provide healthcare oversight, education and support. We are also working with new families who are interested in joining our program.

AFC is a program for individuals on MassHealth who have a medical or mental health diagnosis that requires daily help or cueing and supervision with at least one activity of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, toileting, eating or ambulating. The caregiver receives a generous, tax-free monthly stipend for caring for this individual. Caregivers and members receive ongoing support from a registered nurse and care manager on our AFC team.

***Is this program right for you?*** Many people are already caring for a family member with a disability or for an aging parent and may not be aware of this beneficial program. If you or anyone you know might benefit from this program or have any questions, please contact Barbara Dunker, RN, AFC Program Director, at 781-899-1344 x4710 or [bdunker@oppsforinclusion.org](mailto:bdunker@oppsforinclusion.org).

You can also view a brief video and learn more about AFC on our website at [www.oppsforinclusion.org](http://www.oppsforinclusion.org).



## Good News Story - Moving to Independent Employment

Individuals in our Group Supported Employment (GSE) Program, who work in small groups at Brandeis and Bentley universities under the supervision of an agency staff member, became temporarily unemployed when college campuses closed during the pandemic. Lisa Dunker, Employment Coordinator, worked with individuals who wanted to be employed to explore Independent Supported Employment (ISE) at jobs in the local community. Moving to independent employment meets a goal we have for many of our Employment participants and is a great option for participants who have gained employment skills in our GSE program and are ready to move on to working in competitive employment. While ISE entails a greater degree of independence than GSE, participants are set up for success through the support of an Opportunities for Inclusion job coach, who regularly checks in with them and their supervisors.

Danny, pictured at right, previously worked in the dish room at Bentley University. When the university closed its campus to non-essential staff, he could no longer earn a paycheck. Eager to work and help his family, Danny was recently hired at Home Depot, with our support. Following training on safe practices in the community and at work, he is once again experiencing the pride of holding a job, earning a paycheck and contributing to his family's needs. Danny will continue to receive job coaching and support from Opportunities for Inclusion while working independently to ensure his success.

Other individuals have begun working independently at Stop & Shop and other area supermarkets during this time.



Danny, above, enjoys his new job at Home Depot.

## Community Service Continues During the Pandemic

Individuals in our programs are proud to have participated in a number of community service projects, with staff support, over the past several months. Using a grant from the Jones Partnership Fund and funds donated by the Waltham Rotary Club, they organized and delivered supplies to The Salvation Army in Waltham for Thanksgiving food baskets; Winter Drive clothes collection bin at Rockland Trust benefiting the Middlesex Human Services Agency and Africano Waltham; Community Day Center of

Waltham for homeless individuals; and Diaper Depot for needy families. Community service projects will continue with the support of a renewed grant from the Jones Partnership Fund.



Individuals deliver donations to The Salvation Army of Waltham (left), Community Day Center of Waltham (bottom left) and Winter Drive collection bin (below).





## Celebrating Diversity!



Our diverse staff and program participants bring a rich array of cultures and heritages that we want to highlight and celebrate! This year, we began a series of diversity related activities in our program rooms and our virtual day program. Each month, topics that relate to the cultures, heritages, holidays, traditions and interests of our diverse staff and program participants are presented by both participants and staff.

**February:** well-known figures and topics related to Black History Month were presented and discussed. Gabriel Vonleh, CEO, presented Liberia, West Africa and his personal background.

**March:** St. Patrick's Day, Irish culture and Women's History Month. Mike Grimes, Case Manager, presented an overview of Ireland including a video of his daughter demonstrating Irish step dancing.

**April:** Spring; Easter; Patriots' Day; National Poetry Month; Earth Day; and Bruce Lee, presented by Edythe J., Day Habilitation Program participant.

**May:** Cinco de Mayo; Mother's Day; Mother Teresa presented by Edythe J.; Memorial Day and Veterans, presented by James Jones, DD assistant.

**June:** Summertime Fun; World Environment Day; Flag Day; History/Origin of Juneteenth presented by Gabriel Vonleh; and Father's Day. Photos of staff members/fathers with their children were posted in our entrance lobby.

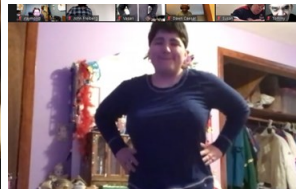
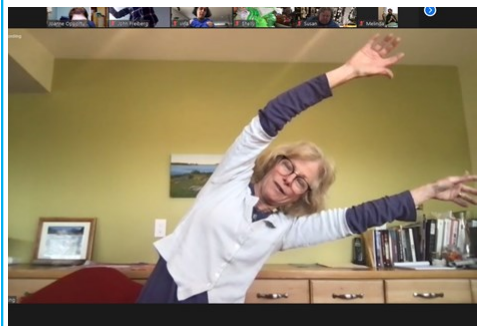
**July:** July 4th, Inspirational Stories, Clean Water, Healthy Talk and Hockey.

**Thanks to Rhonda Fleming,** Case Manager, for leadership and coordination of our monthly diversity activities, and for also providing many fun and informative presentations!



Alex N., a participant in our GSE Program, reads a presentation he prepared about Martin Luther King, Jr. in February.

## Virtual Day Program Update



Clockwise from top left: CC King leads a creative movement session, James Jones presents music and drumming, Jessica C. leads Line Dancing and Martha McCown introduces her pets.

Our Virtual Day Program began in the Spring of 2020 and quickly became very popular, allowing participants to stay connected and engaged while our agency was closed during the pandemic. We lent iPads to individuals who did not have access to technology at home so they could join in.

This program is continuing weekdays 10 am - 2:30 pm for individuals who are not yet ready to return in person. A typical schedule includes: morning meeting/check-in, life skills, music with staff member/musician James Jones, creative movement with CC King, games, music chosen by participants, art, virtual field trips and more. Jessica C., GSE Program participant, leads line dancing sessions and Danny P. leads Zumba.

We enjoy presentations by participants and staff that are viewed by virtual and on-site participants, including holiday celebrations, poetry, short story readings and history as part of our Celebrating Diversity initiative.

We enjoyed a fun pet therapy session with Martha McCown of the Pets and People Foundation. We met Martha's two cats and two dogs, and participants showed off their own pets! Bentley Service-Learning student volunteers and Brandeis Buddies students joined weekly during the Spring semester, bringing fun and educational activities.

## Fundraisers & Annual Meeting

Fundraisers in 2020 and 2021 included two new virtual events: **Virtual Turkey Trot Fun Walk/Run** and **Virtual Wine Tasting**, as well as a restaurant fundraiser with **The Chateau in Waltham**.

We are grateful to our sponsors for their generous support for these inaugural events.

### Virtual Turkey Trot Fun Walk/Run Sponsors:

- **Boston Managed IT**
- **Coastal Capital Group**
- **Connors & Connors LLP**
- **Dave DiGregorio Real Estate**
- **DreamingCode**
- **East Cambridge Savings Bank**
- **Hillcrest Properties**
- **Kevin P. Martin & Associates**
- **The Nelson Companies**
- **P.R. Douglas Heating & Air Conditioning**
- **Sallop Insurance**
- **Sentinel Benefits & Financial Group**
- **The Village Bank**

**We walked where we were!**

Joan Bergin, right, CBDS participant, on a Turkey Trot beach walk.



### Virtual Wine Tasting:

Generously organized by Siobhan O'Connell, hosted by Mike O'Connell, Victor Ordonez and Brad Wasik and sponsored by **Gelineau & Associates Real Estate**.

Please visit [givebutter.com/WineTastingforOFI](https://givebutter.com/WineTastingforOFI) to view the video.

Our **2020 Annual Meeting** was held virtually. Community awards presented:

- **John L. Battaglini Award of Excellence** – *Kristina Smith, Independent Supported Employment*
- **"Rags" LaCava Community Service Award** – *Frances Paolini (posthumously), longtime Wheels of Happiness volunteer who passed away in August 2020*
- **Natalie and Leona Selines Annual Award (New)** – *Watch City Self Advocates, for advancement of opportunities for socialization and recreation. Natalie was a former Board President and employee, and Leona was a longtime participant in our programs.*

## Recent Grants and Donations

We are grateful for these recent grants and generous donations:

- Foundation for MetroWest Emergency Relief Fund - supplemental grocery gift cards and rent assistance to needy families caring for individuals with disabilities
- Jones Partnership Fund - grant funding for "Building Connections through Community Service" project to support Day Habilitation, CBDS and Recreation community service activities
- Hobbs Brook Management LLC
- Daniel F. and Margaret MacAdam Loughry Charitable Foundation Trust
- Bequest from the Estate of John A. Quisenberry
- Rockland Trust Charitable Foundation
- Rotary Club of Waltham
- Ron and Karen Selines/Selines Family Fund
- Michael & Vincenza Vinciullo Charitable Foundation Trust
- Waltham Community Foundation
- Waltham Cultural Council - arts programming
- Waltham Lions Club
- City of Waltham Community Development Block Grant - COVID-19 relief, elevator and HVAC modernization/upgrade, program support
- Massachusetts Emergency Management Association (MEMA) - Personal Protective Equipment: masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, thermometers
- Staples Waltham - art/school supplies, hand sanitizer, tissue packets
- Lisa Wolfe - handmade cloth masks (see photo page 2)

Thanks to all for their generous support!



Left to right: Michael Ford, Staples Waltham Manager; Gabriel Vonleh, CEO; Lee Borland, Staples Sales Manager; and Peter Cohn, Case Manager, gather outside Staples in Waltham after loading donated art/school supplies into our van.



## Program Happenings!



Sewing is popular and fun! Above, Edythe J. models her reversible apron. Below, Brian H. displays a tote bag that he sewed.



Mosaic trivets made by participants in our Day Habilitation Program are an example of art projects planned by direct care staff.



James Jones directs the 56 Chestnut Band, a participant drumming and singing group, which is practicing to perform for everyone at Opportunities for Inclusion.



Michelle C. works with Kareen Irving-Williams, Case Manager, on an exercise to develop motor skills.



Chris R. prepares one of our raised garden beds for planting.

## Board of Directors Update

Effective June 1, 2021 our Board Officers are:

Siobhan O'Connell, President  
Shawn D. Keefe, Esq., Vice President  
Kaitlyn Riley, Treasurer  
Kathy Horrigan, Secretary

**Immediate Past President:** Gerard Cosby

### Board Members:

Juanita Allen	Dennis Johnson
John Barry	Anthony McPherson
Kevin Douglas	Ed Sauerwald
Tom Duca	Kristina Smith
Harvey Fisher	Tim Steele
Robert Gallagher	Emma Williams

We thank our Board of Directors for their support!



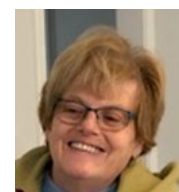
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OPPORTUNITIES  
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Formerly GWArc

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

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### Electronic Newsletter

To receive our newsletter and other updates by email, please send an email message to [jraymond@OppsforInclusion.org](mailto:jraymond@OppsforInclusion.org), call 781-899-1344 x4147, or visit [OppsforInclusion.org](http://OppsforInclusion.org).



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### Guardians/Families/ Residential Staff - Join Our Advisory Meetings!

We meet once a month with guardians, families and residential staff to keep everyone up to date with what's happening and to get your input. Meetings currently take place on Zoom.

The meeting agenda includes updates from Gabriel Vonleh, CEO, as well as updates on all programs, with an opportunity for attendees to ask any questions and give us feedback. Meeting schedule through September is:

**Tuesday, July 20, 5 pm**

**Tuesday, August 10, 5 pm**

**Tuesday, September 14, 5 pm**

To get the Zoom meeting id, please send an email to Joanne Raymond at [jraymond@oppsforinclusion.org](mailto:jraymond@oppsforinclusion.org) or call 781-899-1344 x4147. See you there!



We hope to celebrate our  
**50th Annual  
Harvest Breakfast**  
our signature community fundraiser  
in the Fall of 2021!  
Stay tuned for updates!

### YOU Can Make a Difference!

**As we welcome individuals back to our programs, please help us continue to provide high quality services to individuals we serve, with the COVID-19 supplies still needed.**

Please make your tax-deductible donation online at

[OppsforInclusion.org](http://OppsforInclusion.org)

**DONATE NOW**

You can make your gift...

- in memory of someone
- in honor of someone
- to celebrate a special occasion (Graduation, Birthday, Anniversary) and we will send an acknowledgement of your gift (without the amount) to the person(s) or family you designate. *Donations of any amount are welcome.*

**New! Consider an automatic monthly donation**—visit our website for more information!

Or mail a check to:

**Opportunities for Inclusion**  
56 Chestnut St, Waltham, MA 02453  
**Thank You!**