

CHOICES

Fall 2008

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Mr. Brothers is an avid outdoorsman. The loss of his sight has not stopped him from chasing his dreams.

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SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITIONS CONFERENCE

In September 2008 Community Options, Inc. (COI) joined parents, educators, professionals, advocates, and individuals with disabilities from across the country to participate in a pioneering three-day conference on the importance of *School to Work – Transitions for Young Adults with Disabilities*.

The primary purpose of the annual COI conference is to focus on a topic that is important to the people we support. The secondary purpose is to provide an opportunity for staff, parents, educators, and people with disabilities from across the country to meet and share information. This year's conference, held at the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville TN, focused on the sharing of resources related to school to employment transitions. Thanks to Lisa Smith and the organizing committee for designing a stimulating agenda, and to the board members who attended and participated (Marge Brown, Tom Burdick, Tim Carden, Delia Donahue, Peter Dulligan, Paul Hritz, Derek Wright, Clarence York and Frank Zak). Special thanks and recognition to Karen Hensley, Regional Vice President, and her Nashville Team who went above and beyond to welcome us all to their wonderful city.

The Nashville conference kicked off with keynote speaker Timothy Carden (Founding Partner of Public Private Strategy Group). Carden challenged us to continue our reputation for innovation as we expand our transitions programs to include teens and young adults. Plenary Speakers included Dr. Dan Baker (Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities) and Dr. Frank R. Rusch (Professor of Special Education at Penn State University). Both are internationally recognized and well-published

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Keynote speaker Timothy Carden, Trustee, Community Options Inc. with Karen Hensley, Regional Vice President for Kentucky, South Carolina, & Tennessee

New Van Gives New Resident a Lift in South Carolina

Every so often we hear an individual story that reminds us of how privileged we are to support the people who need our assistance. In early October we learned about a woman who was visiting her new Community Options' group home for the first time. This young woman has a spinal cord injury due to a rare degenerative disorder, and she has been living under very unfortunate circumstances. In fact, she has not been able to leave her residence for more than a year, outside of occasional ambulance trips to the hospital. Members of our South Carolina team were able to take her for a ride in the new lift van to visit the brand new home that she will soon occupy with three other individuals. While viewing the house, the young woman picked out her bedroom – one with an eastern exposure so that she will see the sun rise each morning. After her visit, and to express her thanks, she sent an email to Risley Linder, Executive Director for South Carolina. She wanted to thank everyone for assisting her in the transition to her new home. She wrote that the new home would change her life and motivate her to move forward.

Dr. Guberman appointed to Governor's Council for Medical Research & Treatment of Autism

Dr. Jessica Guberman, COI Executive Director for Northern New Jersey, was recently appointed to the NJ Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism by Governor Jon Corzine.

The New Jersey Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism was created by state statute in 1999.

COI Support Manager receives Leadership Award

Lydia Morris, a Community Support Manager from Burlington NJ, was recently selected to receive the Leadership Award from the New Jersey Association of Community Providers, Inc. (NJACP). The award will be presented at the annual conference in Atlantic City, NJ.

Lydia has recently celebrated ten years with Community Options. Thank you for your leadership and service, Lydia!

El Paso to Celebrate International Day for Individuals with Disabilities

El Paso will celebrate the International Day for Individuals with Disabilities on 12/03/08 with the second Annual Balloon release. COI staff will release one green balloon for each of the 150 individuals we are supporting in Texas, and one gray balloon representing each of the 13 state institutions that remain open in the Lone Star state.



Chasing a Dream

Mr. Scott Brothers, a young man from Binghamton NY, is an avid outdoorsman and a skilled bow hunter. In 2005, Scott sustained a brain injury that resulted in the loss of his sight. However, this has not stopped him from chasing his dreams. Scott came to Community Options' Binghamton office and engaged Service Coordinator Dewey Stewart and Executive Director Paul Weckel in some creative thinking. With the help of a local sporting club, the trio was able to put together an adaptive bow for Scott's use. The new bow includes specially cut arrows, a draw loc system and a laser site (that allows a spotter to look over Scott's shoulder and give him the coordinates). The fabrication is nearly complete and Scott Brothers will begin honing his skills at local target ranges with the help of family and friends. This month, he will return to the woods for his first bow hunt with his father since 2004. *"My dreams are coming true again and I am on a roll,"* says Scott with enthusiasm. *"I cannot believe there are services for me like this that would actually help me accomplish this. I am so excited and thankful for Community Options helping me achieve this."*

New Children's Home Helps Strengthen Families

You just returned home from a long day at work. As you start to settle in for the night, your phone rings. The voice on the other end says that your son has been badly hurt and is in the hospital and you need to come immediately. What would you do if your son with Autism Spectrum Disorder was living in an institution in another state and you got this call? The parent of one of our new clients did what we all would do. He climbed into his car to get his son, driving two and a half hours to a neighboring state.

Just six months earlier, this parent had decided that his son required more specialized treatment than he was able to provide at home. Due to the lack of residential availability in NJ, he selected an institution in a neighboring state. What do you do when your son with Autism requires specialized services that you are not able to provide in your home and there are no local or even state resources for you to utilize? The parent in this story is not unique in his decision to place his son in an institution outside of his state. After the incident, he brought his son home again. He began to work diligently with his son's case manager to find a residential placement that was closer to home. Coincidentally, at the same time, Community Options was opening its first children's group home. The Children's Enhancement Placement Pilot (CPEP) is offered through the State of New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities. Community Options was the first provider in the state to open a group home for children under this program. The purpose of the CPEP is to build capacity within NJ so we can stop sending our children out of state for residential services.

Community Options received the referral for this teenage son in August 2008. He was able to move into his new home on October 2, 2008. This young man now has his own space with large living areas and one housemate. He also lives with two "house parents", full-time staff, and he attends high school five days a week.

Family is critical to the treatment process. The goal of the program is to strengthen family ties in order to start the journey of healing. Community Options is happy to facilitate this process for the many children and families we currently serve in New Jersey. We are equally dedicated to serving children with developmental disabilities throughout the country.

Amusement Park opens its doors to COI

On August 14, Wonderland Amusement Park of Amarillo TX opened its doors exclusively to members of Community Options. Participants braved the Mouse Trap roller coaster, rode the Scrambler, maneuvered the bumper cars, and enjoyed the log water ride (next year we'll bring towels). Many said that this was their first trip to an amusement park, and their very first ride on a roller coaster.

School To Work Transitions Conference

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experts in the field of educational psychology and transition services. Dr. Baker stressed the importance of all programs incorporating positive approaches. On the second day of the conference, Dr. Colleen Wieck (Executive Director of the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities) grounded everyone with her documentation of the history of disability services. Leslie Mason, Program Administrator of the Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities, urged the development of a statewide infrastructure to support transition. We were all inspired by Charles Scrivener's personal story of self-advocacy and achievement. The conference heartily applauded Kenneth (Kenny) Fiore from Ocean County, NJ who attended with his caregiver, Patrick O'Toole. One of the dreams noted in Kenny's personal plan was to visit Nashville!

Messages from the speakers included proof that paid work experiences in school are highly associated with getting a diploma and a job, and the shameful statistic that more than 160,000 youth with disabilities drop out of school every year!!! We learned never to accept "Same as Last Year" in an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) or transition plan and to maintain a sense of urgency in working with families and educators. COI rolled out its new S.T.E.P. (School To Employment Program) model and we all agreed to share policy, procedure and contract templates as we go forward. The COI Transition team (David Awrachow, Jessica Guberman, Karen Hensley, Corey Hribar and Lisa Smith) is currently partnering with schools, businesses and government to implement the S.T.E.P. Program into the local high school curriculum in a number of districts. First efforts will include parent workshops to explain mandated transition services and to build community interest in COI services. The unique yearlong S.T.E.P. program will provide students with disabilities the opportunity to sample real workplace jobs. The overall mission of the program is to provide meaningful employment for students with disabilities upon the day of their graduation!

For more information on S.T.E.P., please contact:

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Mr. Kenneth Fiore in Nashville, TN



Derek Wright, Marge Brown, Dr. Colleen Wieck, Dr. Clarence York, & Robert Stack, President & CEO



Conference attendees Sandi Klink (seated) and her sister, Jan Tobias



Jane Winstead, Director of Transition Services for the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education speaking with a parent after her presentation

In July of 2008, Community Options launched **Presents of Mind**, the latest entrepreneurial business owned and operated by Community Options. Located in Mt. Olive Township NJ, this state-of-the-art facility houses a unique gift store that provides job training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities throughout the region. (www.presentsofmind.org).

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COI Opens First Olmstead House

On July 16th, 2008, Harold Anson moved from the New Lisbon Developmental Center to his new home in Beachwood, NJ. Harold had been living in New Lisbon since 1946. The “outside world” (as he calls the community) was quite a bit different from what he remembered. Harold is now delighted to have his own bedroom (and a king-sized bed!) after years of sharing a room with three men. He enjoys being outside, sitting on his back porch or riding his bike through the new neighborhood. Harold is free to choose his own foods for the first time in his life, and at age 74, is learning to prepare meals for himself. Harold loves to stay busy and has no plans on retiring. He hopes to find a job in the community where he can earn his own money. Harold has many dreams for his future, which include vacationing at a dude ranch where he can ride horses, and attending some Eagles football games.

Harold’s house represents the first house to open in the State of New Jersey through the Olmstead Plan. In 1999, in the *Olmstead v. L.C.* case, the United States Supreme Court affirmed the right of individuals with disabilities to live in the community. Under the regulations, states must undertake all reasonable steps necessary to allow people with developmental or mental disabilities to live in the community to the fullest extent possible. New Jersey has been slow to abide by this mandate, but is now taking steps to move forward. Community Options continues to be at the forefront, helping people who have previously been left out of the transition process to live and work in the community with dignity, choice and self-determination.



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