

# CHOICES

SPRING 2008

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference “Securing the Future & Bridging the Gap”

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Community Options is holding their annual National Conference in Nashville, Tennessee at the Hermitage Hotel from September 7-10, 2008. This year's Conference focuses on Transitional School-To-Work programs for young adults with developmental disabilities.

Transitional School-To-Work programs are essential to preparing high school students with disabilities for entry into the workforce.

Community Options' Conferences provide a national forum that promotes greater social and economic participation of people with disabilities, and results in a consensus-based plan of action. Participants, which include individuals with disabilities, parents, professionals, and employers, will have the opportunity to discuss current issues regarding Transitional Services or the lack thereof, identify barriers, opportunities, and developing short and long-term plans for local and national action and advocacy.

For more information please visit:  
[www.transitionschooltowork.org](http://www.transitionschooltowork.org)

## Former NJ Department of Human Services Commissioner Named Vice President of Educational & Transitional Services

Michele Kent Guhl is the Former Commissioner of the Department of Human Services. In her most recent position she was appointed by Governor Jon S. Corzine as the Executive Director for the Commission on Rationalizing Health Care Resources. The Commission's charge was to develop recommendations for rationalizing, developing and prioritizing the financial and support system for New Jersey's acute care hospitals.



*Michele Guhl - Vice President of Educational & Transitional Services*

In her position as the VP of Educational and Transitional Services, Ms. Guhl will begin a regionally based cutting edge pilot program for transitional students with disabilities that is sustainable and can be duplicated throughout the state. She will increase awareness with local and state legislators, parent groups, child study teams, advocates and district and county administrators.

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In an article published by the New York Times on February 24, 2008, a recent Bridgespan group study stated that nationally out of 200,000 non profit organizations established since 1970, only 144 reached a \$50 million operating budget by 2003 (33 years) .

Community Options, as of 2007, reached a budget of over \$51 million. Established in 1989, this shows the remarkable accomplishments of all staff in being the provider of choice. We have only been around 19 years and Community Options is one of the most successful, fastest growing non-profits supporting persons with disabilities.

*The organizations that grew the most brought in talent and built organizations that support a high-growth strategy. - The Bridgespan Group*



## Terry Morrison – Living Her Own Life

The brand new, large colonial style home where Terry Morrison lives is similar in most respects to the other houses on her quiet street in Barnegat. But the experiences Morrison and her housemates are having within its walls are just as fresh as its tan vinyl siding and cranberry-colored shutters. Morrison lived for years at the New Lisbon Developmental Center—one of seven state institutions for people with developmental disabilities—until September of 2006. Their house in Barnegat is a privately run group home. “My life has gotten better since moving. I feel like my life is my own,” said Morrison, 53, who was diagnosed in childhood with mild mental retardation. “I am happier than ever.” The reason, she says, is that “I feel safe and free here.” Her group home—an inviting single family house with four bedrooms—is owned and operated by Community Options. The newly built home was donated in 2006 by Kara Homes, a developer in New Jersey, just months before Morrison and Seiler moved in. Leaving the institution has allowed Morrison to embark on a host of new experiences that she never imagined she would have. Together, the home’s residents share light chores, do their own laundry, tend to their personal needs and choose what to do for other recreation.

Morrison and her housemates are achieving the kind of normalcy that advocates for people with disabilities agree should be the norm for people with developmental disabilities to be included as much as possible into the community. Over the past 30 years, the number of people with developmental disabilities living in public institutions in the United States has decreased by 73 percent. In that time, New Jersey has reduced the number of people living in institutions by 59 percent.

With the move into community group homes comes a period of adjustment for residents. “People who move from institutions into group homes must learn how to deal with their new freedoms and with the choices they can now make,” said Diane D’Orazio, Executive Director of the Ocean/Monmouth county offices. “It is so

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## “Above and Beyond All Expectations”

On December 3, 2007, Community Options offices around the country participated in the International Day of Disabled Persons by holding a balloon release ceremony.

This day aimed to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well being of persons with disabilities. It also sought to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

The National Development Council of Community Options named the balloon release ceremony - “Above and Beyond All Expectations.” This phrase is paramount in the organization’s belief of the level of service that should be available to all persons with disabilities throughout the country. All individuals with disabilities should reside and work in inclusive communities, communities that know no barriers. Above and Beyond All Expectations released two different colored balloons. Gray balloons signify the number of institutions still open in the United States that house people with disabilities in deplorable and inhumane conditions. Green balloons for us represent hope. Hope in the thousands of individuals that we have successfully assisted in transitioning from institutions and helped to obtain meaningful and gainful employment and warm and loving homes.

To read more about the balloon release for each region please visit [www.communityoptions.blogspot.com](http://www.communityoptions.blogspot.com).

## 17th Annual Live & Silent Auction

Friday, May 16, 2008

6:30 PM – 10:30 PM

Cherry Valley Country Club  
Skillman, NJ

Contact: Jaclyn Greenberg  
(609) 951-9900



Mark Jenner receives an award from Taco Bell for his 10-years of service. - El Paso, Texas

## EL PASO, TX

Our new home in Northeast El Paso is officially open!

A beautiful new ranch-style house on Cross Street is now home to four women. Three of the women left a state institution. They are now enjoying the independence of being able to make their own choices and the closeness of community living. One of the more thrilling aspects for the women is the fact they now can enjoy the individuality and freedom of their own bedroom!

The house is situated within a typical residential neighborhood, complete with parks, community centers, stores, and public transportation. The placement of this home maximizes the opportunity for interactions with neighbors and other members in the community.

The ladies enjoy attending our program where they are currently developing vocational and independent living skills. Their participation in the community integration activities has been a positive growth experience as they look forward to becoming involved in a variety of community activities.

## BINGHAMTON, NY

Community Options of Binghamton has embarked on a new and exciting enterprise. *Coffee Stop* will be serving specialty coffees at the First Friday Art Walk held each month at the Binghamton office. On the first Friday of every month, the Binghamton Office opens to the public as a studio of artists with disabilities and their teacher's paintings and artwork. The crowds are plentiful and the event is a social affair. To capitalize on this opportunity it was decided to showcase the newly renovated rooms in another way. One of the rooms acts as a mini-café, with an atmosphere that lends itself to the intimate coffee house persona.

## CHATTANOOGA, TN

Debra T. transitioned from Greene Valley Developmental Center to Chattanooga's Residential program in November 2004, and since that time has made tremendous progress. After being institutionalized for 39 years, Debra is now able to enjoy daily recreational activities, including going to the movies and recreation center, attending baseball games, as well as enjoying concerts and festivals. Debra's health and overall well-being improved so dramatically that in August 2007, she was able to move into her own apartment.

## PITTSBURGH, PA

COI Pittsburgh's annual "Gift of Giving" Holiday fundraiser took place at Century III Mall from December 7<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup>. One hundred dedicated volunteers gave their all, helping people select wrapping paper and taking on the monumental task of gift wrapping hundreds of presents. After countless hours of wrapping, yards upon yards of wrapping paper, and a few thousand paper cuts, the fundraiser concluded and was declared a huge success.

## South Carolina

*This house is the first of six new homes awarded to Community Options in South Carolina. We will purchase three homes and construct three brand new totally accessible homes that are protected by sprinkler systems.*



Give the gift of flowers & support employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities:

[www.vaseful.com](http://www.vaseful.com)  
1.877.vaseful

**Community Options, Inc.**  
16 Farber Road  
Princeton, NJ 08540

Creative Services, a subsidiary of  
Community Options Enterprises,  
designed & produced this newsletter as  
well as the Community Options website  
employing persons with & without disabilities.

[www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org)

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## **Terry Morrison** Living Her Own Life



*Residents & Official Ribbon Cutters  
Nancy Seiler & Terry Morrison - 2006*

To view video of Ribbon cutting please visit:  
[www.youtube.com/user/CommunityOptions](http://www.youtube.com/user/CommunityOptions)

Excerpt printed with permission from  
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issue of **People and Families Magazine**,  
published by the NJ Council on  
**Developmental Disabilities**.

wonderful to see Terry grow and be able to express herself and make choices,” she added. For Morrison, moving into the group home has also meant a chance at employment. For the first time, she has a job, earns her own money and opened her first bank account. Each weekday, Morrison works a three-hour shift at McDonald’s in Manahawkin. She was most proud of being able to shop for Christmas gifts for friends and family. “I paid with my own money. Doing that made me feel very good,” she noted, adding the past year has been one of many “firsts.” She even paid for her first vacation to a dude ranch in upstate New York.

Morrison and her housemates also enjoy recreational activities, including trips to the local library, dances at a local Elks club lodge and bingo at the nearby Good Shepherd Church. Morrison’s uncle, Charles Albin, said he has noticed a substantial change in his niece. Since moving into the group home, “Terry seems to be more outgoing and happier,” Albin said. “She sends us letters every so often and calls us on the phone. That is something she never did before. I would have to say, I notice a difference in her.” He said he is heartened Morrison receives more personal coaching and guidance to help her become as independent as possible. “They have an excellent staff and program at her group home,” Albin said. “She is encouraged to explore her interest in arts and crafts and get out into the community where she makes a little money and learns to use and save it. Terry’s next goal is to master public transportation. “Soon, I am going to be able to go to work on a bus by myself,” Terry said. “I get driven now. Going on a bus would be great.”