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CHOICES

Community Options, Inc.

Supporting People with Disabilities Since 1989.

Winter 2005

Benefits with Benefits: Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield is New Insurance Carrier

A new year brings new benefits for Community Options employees and their families. Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield will be the official health insurance carrier, beginning January 1st. We would like to take a moment to remind our employees of the great benefits that this new carrier will provide.

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On October 18, 2005, Project Opportunity received a \$500 Affirmative Action and Diversity Award from the Opportunity Development Center.



Luke Tynan of Syracuse won \$1,000 in the 3rd Annual Community Options of Central New York Sweepstakes held in October. The sweepstakes was sponsored by local businesses, with a chinese auction and live music. Luke was presented the prize by Michelle DeLong, Community Support Staff

Project Opportunity

A few months ago, Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, in Nashville, TN received a startup grant from Vocational Rehabilitation to develop and implement Project Opportunity, a dynamic new initiative to provide job experience and opportunities to high school seniors with developmental disabilities. Modeled after a highly successful program at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Project Opportunity represents a partnership among Vanderbilt University Medical Center, the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services, Community Options and the Williamson County School System.

After reporting to their home schools, students of the program arrive at the hospital where they spend one hour in classroom instruction conducted by the Project Opportunity staff regarding workplace behavior, employability skills, job search strategies and training on the particular job rotations. Community Options helps to provide some job coaching and job development expertise. Then, students report to their job rotation, which could include distributing stuffed animals or stocking nurse supplies. Each participant will have two to four unpaid work site rotations during the school year to experience various types of jobs. Before leaving, students gather in the classroom for a discussion and debriefing about the positives and negatives of the day.

Students graduating from Project Opportunity will understand the value of working and develop pride in their workplace and in themselves. The need for qualified employees is everywhere, as are individuals with disabilities needing jobs. Project Opportunity seeks to bridge the gap between these two needs in a way that is beneficial, profitable and successful.

A Safe and Healthy Workplace Benefits Everyone

Community Options has recently been taking steps towards creating the healthiest and safest environment possible for our employees by keeping our staff educated and up to date on all of the latest policies, procedures and regulations. As a result, we are happy to say that the company's workman's compensation claims have been on a steady decline.

Three important contributing factors to the raised awareness are monthly Health & Safety meetings, performance reviews and safety checklists. In order to keep all of our employees well-

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GOOD NEWS STORIES

Dallas, TX- Jamie Hernandez, one of the individuals supported by the Dallas office, has made a very large step in life. Jamie, a 20-year-old male, has severe mental retardation and attended school until May 2005. After school, his parents were a little nervous about him attending a day program, but the COI staff found a place for him. The first day Jaime only stayed for 1 hour but he decided to return again. Since his first visit, Jaime has attended the day program 3 days out of the week for 6 hours a day. This brought his parents to tears because they didn't think Jaime would make it in the real world. Jamie has had a very positive experience with COI and loves going to his day program.

Binghamton, NY- Kelly came to COI's supported employment program in Feb 2005. She had been through several other service providers with no success in finding or maintaining employment beyond fast food. Kelly comes from a small rural town and very much wanted to be connected in a job of significance within her community. Kelly is friendly and out-going and has made many contacts in her hometown. She connected with a woman who was looking to open a bakery/cafe in the community and was determined to be part of this creation. In May 2005, Kelly and her job coach met with Linda, the owner of the bakery, and was hired to work 5 days a week. Kelly has the responsibility of opening the bakery at 5am and making the doughnuts. She has taken this role very seriously and is now thriving in her job. Kelly is working and involved in her hometown community, a goal she had right from the start!

Forked River, NJ- This past August, Sue Ellen Johnson moved into her own apartment. She shares it with one roommate. Over the summer she began working at Community Options' Forked River office as the receptionist. Her duties include answering the phone, making copies and organizing paperwork. After work she enjoys shopping and going out to dinner with friends. She said that working at COI has impacted her life greatly. Everyone at the office believes she is doing a wonderful job.

New Days of Caring Program Proves a BIG SUCCESS

On Wednesday, November 9th, Community Options, Inc. and Bristol Myers Squibb teamed up to kick off The Days of Caring. Volunteers from both companies spent the day working on the interior and exterior of the Windybush group home in Ewing, NJ. The Bristol Myers Squibb volunteer team consisted of IT managers from around the United States as well as Brazil, Panama and Canada. They worked quickly and efficiently and were able to get more done than was expected. Together they repainted walls, took down wallpaper, cleaned carpets, floors and windows, raked the yard



and gave the place a general "face lift". "We are so grateful to the volunteers from Bristol Myers Squibb" said Morgan Castagna from Community Options. "The group home looks great and we wouldn't have been able to do it if it wasn't for them."

New Projects for COI-NY

Some very exciting things are going on in the Borough of Queens. Community Options (COI) has been working on the development of two new projects.

One of those projects has been a year and a half in the making. COI has been working with OMRDD to open a 3-person IRA in Queens, NY. This house is slowly becoming a reality after some unexpected renovations and building related delays. COI hired and trained staff in order to prepare for a pre-opening survey that happened on November 29th. Three individuals with the highest priority for residential placement moved in in early December. This home will demonstrate once again that smaller is more appropriate.

The second project that has just passed another beauracratc hurdle is a one-person supportive IRA. This project is unique because it involves an individual with a developmental disability who has a small child. Although this project was approved for development over a year ago, COI just secured appropriate housing for this person and her child. OMRDD recently viewed the apartment and it looks like this small project will go forward. COI is hoping to have everything completed by New Year's Day.

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Benefits with Benefits:

- No PCP's! Employees will not be required to designate a primary health care physician (PCP) and the office copays have decreased.
- No referrals! Employees will not be required to obtain a referral prior to seeking care.
- Rx savings! With larger formulary guides, it is less likely that prescriptions will not be covered and fall into the higher fee category. Plus, the prescription copays have decreased.
- Vision Plan through BCBS will use the specialist copay and employees will receive \$100 towards lenses at DavisVision.com.
- Community Options, Inc. is in the process of building a website where employees can access all of the necessary forms and summaries about the new insurance plans. Each office will have a designated computer for Health Care use.

In an effort to reward our seasoned employees, our new health insurance will also enable all eligible full-time staff, with 4 or more years of service, to pay absolutely nothing towards the cost of employee only coverage. These candidates will still incur the 30%/70% cost sharing schedule with any one of the employee/dependent coverage tiers, less the cost of employee only coverage. If you have any questions in regards to how you or your family might be affected by this new service, please contact the Human Resources Department.

Employees of the Quarter

NJ:
Ericka Cunningham
Community Support Coordinator

Ericka Cunningham is a Community Support Coordinator in Burlington, NJ. Ericka began at Community Options in April 2005 and has worked diligently since then. She not only assures a high quality of care for the individuals we support, but also maintains a high level of professionalism.

Ericka has worked in the field for 15 years. This history has given her the compassion and understanding it takes to support both the Community Support Staff and Managers. She greets you with smile or a joke no matter what is going on around her and her dependability goes unmatched.

The Burlington office is proud to have Ericka named NJ's Employee of the Quarter.

NY:
Nominee: Robert Kelly
Community Support Staff

Robert Kelly works at one of the residential houses in NY as a part of the Community Support Staff. He has been a friend to 'the guys' there for over 9 years. Having worked as a Rehabilitation Coach, an Assistant Manager and now one of the Community Support Staff for Community Options, he is committed to the aid he offers to those who live in the home.

No matter what job Robert takes on, he gives it his best. He is always there to work his shift, through rain or snow, and is there every Thanksgiving. When he isn't at the group home, he's patching a hole, or putting a door back on its track at any of the NY group homes or at Option Quest.

One of the things he is best loved for are his Thursday and Friday lunches. Bob has put together a group of several individuals and has taken them to truck stop diners throughout Onondaga County for the past couple of years. He makes sure to do it when everyone can attend so they don't miss these weekly social gatherings.

All of his co-workers thank him for his dedication and commitment to the work he does!

PA:
Nominee: Lori Lang
Community Support Manager

Lori Lang is a Community Support Manager in Pittsburgh, PA. Her co-workers describe her as the Energizer Bunny and say that she exceeds the expectations of her job duties each and every day.

During licensing, Lori spent countless hours working in the homes and at the office to prepare. There were days when she would come in early and stay late to ensure the homes were ready for inspection. Currently, she can be found successfully running two residential sites, assisting her CSS Coordinators, and aiding with staff scheduling – a process that is very helpful when extra staff is needed at various residential sites. Numerous times within the last few months Lori herself has covered shifts to ensure consumers needs are adequately fulfilled. When off the clock, Lori can be found spending time with the consumers at baseball games, birthday parties, and dances, as well as volunteering her time to aid with COI fundraising efforts.

Lori greatly impacts the lives of all at COI. It is amazing to see how the consumers' faces light up when she is in the room. They devote their utmost attention to her just as she does to them.

TN:
Nominee: Betty Levy
Staff Coordinator

Betty Levy is the Staff Coordinator in Nashville, TN. She has seen several changes in her job responsibilities since she began with COI and has taken them all in stride.

Due to restructuring within the organization, Betty inherited new responsibilities, such as training of agency employees. Betty received all of her train-the-trainer courses and then took the bull by the horns. She recruited staff, trained new hires and re-trained tenured staff with refresher courses. She made the job run smoothly. It was a pleasure to see someone accept added responsibilities and grow so much with them.

The Nashville office is thankful to have Betty as a valuable member of our team.

TX:
Nominee: Gloria Minjares
House Lead

Gloria Minjares is a House Lead and has been with Community Options for five years. She presently works at the Ratner home in El Paso, Texas.

Gloria is at the house all hours of the day making sure the residents are comfortable and happy. She is very flexible with her schedule and responds quickly when a co-worker calls in sick. Because of her caring mannerism, Gloria has been an asset to El Paso's program since day one. The residents look forward to seeing her and she is well-liked by her fellow co-workers. Gloria demonstrates good leadership qualities that reflect on the manner in which she conducts her duties. Community Options recognized her in December 2004 as a member of the 110 % club, which distinguishes the employees at Community Options who go above and beyond the call of duty.

The El Paso office is privileged to have Gloria on their staff.

WI:
Nominee: Shirleymae Leshinski
Community Support Staff Manager

Shirleymae is the Community Support Staff Manager at the 5th Street house in Oconomowoc, WI. She exemplifies what team work is really about by incorporating clients and employees. Shirleymae goes above and beyond to assure that clients are thriving and achieving their goals and that all employees are treated fairly. She is an asset to COI.

The Oconomowoc office is proud to have Shirleymae on their staff.

NM:
Nominee: Sandy Gallagher
Community Membership program Manager

Sandy Gallagher is the Community Membership Program Manager in the Albuquerque office. Since coming to COI she has put together a program that has restored Community Options' credibility in the community. The program resulted in more referrals and better relations within the provider community. Sandy is also respected by both staff and clients.

The Albuquerque office is fortunate to have Sandy as an employee of COI.

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Bowling in the Special Olympics

John Dethrow, Jimmy Pack and Mark Jenner, individuals that reside at the Celina home in El Paso, TX, are more than just roommates, they are like brothers. They do everything together and have a blast no matter what they do. Recently, all three individuals were selected to participate at a Special Olympics fundraiser sponsored by the El Paso Kegglers Bowling Association during the last week of October. The fundraiser raised money for the upcoming Special Olympics. They bowled with teams from the F.B.I. and the Border Patrol along with other local and federal agencies. Mark Jenner was selected to play on the team with the honored guest, Sgt. Hudson, a POW from the Iraq War. John, Jimmy and Mark also participated in the city wide Special Olympics during the first week of November. They competed in team bowling events as well as individual bowling events. They called their team "The Three Caballeros" and received a gold medal! In the individual events, John Dethrow received a gold medal, and both Jimmy Pack and Mark Jenner received a bronze medal.

Great job guys! Everyone in the Community Options family is proud of you!

Vaseful Launches Its 1st Annual Poinsettia Sale

Vaseful, one of Community Options' enterprises, hosted its 1st Annual Poinsettia Sale at the Princeton Marketfair December 3-11. The first-of-its-kind non-profit florist business sold the hottest varieties and best quality poinsettias for the holiday season. In addition, employees and volunteers were on hand to take special orders from businesses and special event planners. Everyone involved had a wonderful time spreading the holiday spirit and 100% of the proceeds were put back into the program to ensure further growth.

For more information regarding Vaseful,
call 1-877-VASEFUL or visit www.vaseful.com

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A Safe and Healthy Workplace BENEFITS EVERYONE

informed, executives, coordinators and other staff from each office have been holding monthly Health & Safety meetings to discuss new and old concerns on the local, state and national level. Using this information, checklists have been implemented at all of our residential homes to prevent common accidents. Staff is also given performance reviews to ensure that they are following these checklists and all other regulations. "Our employees are making a conscious effort to make their work environment as safe as possible," praises Jason Lee-You of Human Resources.

Thanks to these new safety procedures, workman's compensation claims at Community Options are dropping. At their highest, premiums were a staggering \$1.4 million a year. Through our combined efforts, though, we have been able to get this number down to only \$800,000 in 2005. Lee-You points out, "Money that has been saved in workman's compensations claims can now be used to reward four year employees of Community Options with free healthcare."

Congratulations to our employees for keeping our workplace safe! Keep it up!
