

Cupid's Chase 5-K brings out the love

Written by Bonnie Delaney Special to the Asbury Park Press
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Community Options hosts its annual Cupid's Chase 5K in Seaside Heights, one of 24 locations for races in eight states. / DOUG HOOD/staff photographer

CUPID'S CHASE 5K

Cupid's Chase benefits Community Options Inc., a national nonprofit organization that provides community-based homes and employment support for people with disabilities. For more information, visit <http://www.comop.org/> or <http://www.facebook.com/cupidschase>.

SEASIDE

HEIGHTS — Jen O'Connor, 25, of Stafford, had a little pre-race snack, a banana, Saturday morning before joining about 50 other local runners who took to the streets for the sixth annual Cupid's Chase 5K.

"I come to the race every year because I think it supports a great program and I've always liked to help people," said O'Connor about the fundraising event, which benefits a group home organization, Community Options Inc. O'Connor worked at a Community Options group home in Lacey for several years and remains involved as a member of the Community Options Business Advisory Council.

The event is a large, national, simultaneous charity 5K run, with 24 races scheduled to take place in eight states, according to Svetlana Repic-Qira, regional vice president of New Jersey for Community Options.

In New Jersey, races also were being held in Glen Rock, New Brunswick and Princeton. Races in Morristown and Burlington City were postponed by poor weather conditions, Repic-Qira said.

Judy Sowinski said her 51-year-old daughter, Joyce, who has Down syndrome, has lived in one of the group homes for the past eight years and loves it.

"She loves the independence of being on her own at the home in Stafford. She can cook for herself and bathe and dress herself before she goes to an adult day-care program in Little Egg Harbor," Sowinski said.

Before her daughter was placed in the group home, she lived in the New Lisbon state developmental center in New Lisbon, Pemberton, but was transferred to a group home because it was determined she is high functioning, her mother said.

Sowinski said she was reluctant to leave her daughter home alone all day while she worked and is glad that her daughter was able to get into the group home.

"There's such a great need for more homes," she said.

Sowinski said she can't say enough good things about Community Options, which is one of a number of companies that are contracted by the state to operate group homes in New Jersey. Community Options runs 102 group homes that house 300 people and it also provides employment services for 340 people, said Repic-Qira.

There are 8,000 people in New Jersey on a waiting list for placement in group homes, Repic-Qira said.