

# CHOICES

Winter 2014



Community Options, Inc. provides housing and employment support to people with disabilities.

Philosophy: All persons, regardless of their level of disability, can and should, live and work in the community with dignity, choice and self-determination.

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



Bill Wagner, Executive Director of Community Options Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico.



VALENTINE'S DAY  
February 14th, 2015

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

## Ability Through Employment

*Written by Molly Buckwalter Fairfield*

Bill Wagner brings considerable passion and experience in supported employment to his new position as Executive Director of Community Options Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Bill's colleagues describe him as a quiet leader, one who leads by example, attributes successes to his co-workers, and is deeply passionate about his work – empowering people with disabilities through employment. His passion and humility are obvious even during my brief phone conversation with Bill.

Bill comes to New Mexico from Binghamton, New York where he was the Director of Supported Employment for the state of New York, Community Options' most successful program to date. Todd Hansen, the Regional Vice President of New York and Pennsylvania, worked closely with Bill in New York. Todd attributes the success of the program in part to Bill's ability to build relationships, which he approached from every angle – from the Department of Education, to the Office of Mental Health, to small businesses and big businesses like Wal-Mart and Sodexo. Todd describes Bill as a jack of all trades, able to write grants and manage a variety of services under different contracts, all the while willing to jump in and do job coaching when the need arises!

According to Bill, the key to successful supported employment is staff. When Bill came to Binghamton, there were around 50 individuals and 4.5 staff. Two years later, there were five times as many individuals but the number of staff only doubled. Todd echoes this assertion, saying the ideal employment person has to be flexible, willing to learn new jobs and skills to teach to individuals.

Bill sees supported employment as the core service related to empowering people with disabilities. He has seen the transformative power of employment at work in the lives of the people he serves (ask him for a story!). It's not just about the extra spending money or having a daily routine, although these certainly help. Employment resonates at a deeper level of our humanity – the need to be a valued member of the community.

Currently in New Mexico, Bill is doing what he does best – building a strong supported employment program. He is networking with government agencies and businesses, and is excited about his current group of staff. Bill has recently applied for a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, which will help grow supported employment services in New Mexico.

Bill is simultaneously idealistic and realistic. He doesn't see people in terms of their limitations, but in terms of their abilities and dreams. Bill stubbornly believes that if someone wants to work, then they will be able to work. He is realistic about the very real barriers facing individuals as they seek employment, but he, together with his staff, will tackle these barriers one by one.



We welcome Christina Mazza as our Media-Events Coordinator! In this role, Christina manages our Blackbaud software for fundraising and our social media

presence using Facebook and Twitter. If you have any stories, photos, you would like to share, please feel free to contact Christina at [Christina.Mazza@comop.org](mailto:Christina.Mazza@comop.org).

## Building COI Bench Strength: An Insider's Perspective

*Written by Michele McGregor*

I admit it... I was skeptical when I pulled the non-descript manila envelope from my mailbox. Yet here it was... something surprising ... something good... a framed certificate of appreciation and a formal letter of acceptance to the Leadership Academy.

The Leadership Academy, it explained, is a self-driven training program. The curriculum would be designed not only to provide relevant, position-related information aimed at deepening and refining my skills in my current position, but also to stretch and advance my knowledge for the positions that I will hold in the future. There would be no mandatory attendance, no competency measures, no pressure. The information, the trainings, the articles and the tools would be offered. They would be there. And I could choose to take advantage of them.

Before the launch of the first Leadership Academy training, we were each asked our goals. Mine was very simple: I wanted to learn something that I didn't already know. I achieved that goal immediately. Our first training began with an introduction to leadership, and was supplemented by TED talks, articles and "interesting reads" on effective leadership. Next came training on our fiscal processes. Up until that point, I had limited exposure to our budgets and our budget processes. After the training, I began asking for, and was given, variance reports to review and opportunities to develop budgets for expansion sites. The following training was a presentation on Employment Law. The subject interested me, so I perused the articles posted on the Leadership Academy Intranet, read two books on Human Resources and decided to begin preparing for SPHR Certification. QA training followed, and it prompted me to suggest a quality improvement project that would reduce missed punches in Pittsburgh.

It is not always easy to carve out the time to turn off my phone, shut my office door and log in for an hour in the middle of a Tuesday afternoon for Leadership Academy Training. But when I do, it is worth the effort. It has been almost a year since I pulled that manila folder from my mailbox and read my "Congratulations" letter from Robert Stack. In that time I have more than met the goal that I had in mind when I began the Leadership Academy. I certainly have learned something new, gained some practical knowledge and acquired some immediately implementable skills. But more importantly, I've recaptured my own interest in my own development and reminded myself that advancing my knowledge is in my control. I've stumbled upon new areas of interest and I've enjoyed allowing those new interests to turn into independent, personal pursuits. The tools, the training, the information... it's all there.

And if you are interested in taking advantage of it, there is most certainly room for you too!

Applications are now being accepted for Leadership Academy! If you are interested in applying for the Leadership Academy, please contact your Executive Director for an application. Deadline for applications is February 2nd, 2015.



*Community Options Day Habilitation participants from Binghamton, NY at the Ross Park Zoo.*

Thanks to the Ross Park Zoo in upstate New York, the Community Options Day Habilitation program of Binghamton, NY will have a lot of fun over the next few months. Kelly Shea, who runs the program, created a partnership with the zoo that allows her program participants to develop a closer bond with the animals. Each month, the individuals pick a zoo animal they want to research. They find out the animals' likes and dislikes before building and painting a paper mache structure. Afterwards, they travel back to the Ross Park Zoo. There, zoo workers place a piece of food into the paper mache item, which is then fed to the animal.



On November 12, the individuals got to see a tiger enrichment firsthand! Up next month are the monkeys. As you can guess, our individuals are already really excited to go back!



## At Home for the Holidays



# Community Options, Inc. to launch Microsoft's Office365

Written by Brian Celardo & AnaMaria Herrera

We are excited to announce the launch of Office365 at Community Options, Inc. beginning January 1st, 2015! This initiative is instrumental to our organization's ongoing success. Office365 will drive greater collaboration and communication for all Community Options' employees, thus improving the delivery of services to those we support. Microsoft Office365 will provide all staff full access to organizational communication and knowledge sharing with applications such as Yammer, an internal social networking site for business that looks like Facebook.

Office365 enables anytime/anywhere access to the Microsoft software from a web browser, such as Internet Explorer.

With Office365, all employees will have access to the following:

- Microsoft Outlook Email for every employee
- The latest versions of Microsoft Office Tools (Word 2013, PowerPoint 2013, Excel 2013)
- "Yammer", the social network site for business
- Cloud based file storage where employees can securely store and share files
- "Sharepoint", a file sharing and collaboration tool
- "Lync", a communication and collaboration tool

Office365 is the latest office productivity solution from Microsoft and is broadly used worldwide. Not only will it allow for more seamless communications internally, but with stakeholders outside the company as well. We are delighted to be taking this step as a means to build our programs and services as a non-profit.

December 2014

Dear Friend of Community Options,

**HOME** is a place we all know and cherish. A **HOME** can be simply described as the place where we "hang our hat", eat our meals and prepare for our day. We sometimes even take this place we call **HOME** for granted. We forget that it is more than just a structure; it is also a place of comfort where a lifetime of memories are made.

During the holiday season **HOME** takes on a special meaning for all of us. Our **HOMES** are the places that we find solace and joy. We happily open our doors to family and friends. We decorate, cook, celebrate and gather with those we love to create beautiful memories.

For 25 years, Community Options has cherished the concept of **HOME**. We believe that individuals with disabilities deserve to live in a **HOME**, earn a living and participate in daily life and community activities.

For thousands of individuals who reside in institutions across the United States, this is not the case. The idea of living in a **HOME** is a dream. These individuals have waited for years, even decades, for the opportunity to have a safe and comfortable place to call **HOME**. This is why, for more than a quarter-century, Community Options has worked tirelessly to make **HOME** a reality for thousands of people with disabilities.

**We are proud of how far we have come, but in so many ways feel that we are just getting started.**

Year	States	Number of COI Homes	Individuals Supported in Residential Living
2004	6	118	331
2014	9	255	693

*\*Statistics reflect the number of individuals supported in COI's residential programs only and do not include the thousands of individuals supported in COI programs across the US.*

Please continue to support our work of promoting community integration for all people by sending a donation to Community Options. Your generous support allows Community Options to expand our residential offerings to more individuals who, just like you, want a place to call **HOME** - not just at the holidays, but every day.

Happy Holidays from our **HOMES** to **YOURS**.

Robert Stack  
President & CEO of Community Options, Inc.

During this time of giving, the Community Options family asks for your direct assistance. We remain grateful and so thankful for your continued support.

To find out more about your tax-deductible contribution, please contact  
**Christina Mazza, Media-Events Coordinator**  
**(609)-524-0550 or e-mail Christina.Mazza@comop.org**

**We wish everyone Happy Holidays.**

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

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

2.14.15

VALENTINE'S DAY



Community Options' annual Cupid's Chase 5K is officially slated for Valentine's Day, Saturday, February 14, 2015. So before you go out on a nice romantic evening, or if you're looking to meet that special someone, be sure to find your local Cupid's Chase 5K!!

In 2015, we will have 27 races from NY to AZ. There are several new race locations this year: Cooper River Park, NJ, Trexlertown, PA, Charleston, SC and Tuscon, AZ.

All proceeds will go towards supporting people with disabilities. Community Options invites walkers, runners, joggers and rollers (baby strollers and wheelchairs) to come out and participate. Even if you can't join in the race, come support a great cause and have a good time doing so!

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

 [Facebook.com/CupidsChase](https://www.facebook.com/CupidsChase)

 [@CupidsChase5k](https://twitter.com/CupidsChase5k)

