

CHOICES

Fall 2015



Community Options believes in the dignity of every person, and in the freedom of all people to experience the highest degree of self-determination. Embracing this philosophy, Community Options provides housing, support services and advocacy assistance to help empower people with disabilities.

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Kessler Foundation Awards Community Options \$50,000 for Transportation Study

Community Options was awarded a \$50,000 grant from Kessler Foundation to implement Autability, a one year project aimed at increasing transportation options for people with disabilities. Molly Buckwalter Fairfield, the Grant Writer who shepherded the application process, will be serving as the Autability Project Coordinator.

The main collaborator for this project is Uber, a technology company that connects riders and drivers through a mobile app. Community Options will work with Uber to explore how to improve access to transportation for individuals with disabilities so that they can become more self-sufficient.

Autability is evaluating implementation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Austin, Texas, where both Community Options and Uber have regional offices. The goal will be to streamline the process for individuals with

disabilities to sign up for Uber and create avenues for human services agencies to contribute wheelchair accessible vehicles and drivers into the Uber system.

Many people with disabilities have difficulty maintaining employment, going to the doctor's office, and participating in activities of daily life due to a lack of transportation options. With the use of smart-phone technology to make ride arrangements, doing spontaneous things like picking up a gallon of milk will become a reality for millions of Americans with disabilities.

Reliable transportation will allow individuals with disabilities to live and work more conveniently and comfortably. Stay tuned for more updates!

Community Options Purchases First Home in Santa Fe

Four individuals recently moved into their new home in Santa Fe. The four-bedroom house, located at 7205 Rio del Luna, is the first house owned by Community Options in Santa Fe.

The residents have settled in and are all very proud of their new home. "The first time our residents saw this house, they walked into a home, not just a house with empty rooms," said Santa Fe Executive Director Bill Wagner.

This transition was made

easier thanks to the generous contributions of time and resources from our former Community Options Board Chairman Tim O'Donoghue and his wife Kate Flanagan. Tim's skills and Kate's decorating talents allowed them to create an environment where one could walk in and feel at home immediately.

The transition was completed after staff, volunteers, and a U-Haul truck spent the day moving each individual and their possessions into their new home. Having endured multiple moves over the years,

each individual finally has a home where they are happy and comfortable for as long as they want.

Esther, mother of one of our 41-year-old residents, phoned Bill Wagner that day to say, "I was overcome with tears of joy knowing that my son has a place like that to call home with staff that cares so much for him." We continue to work throughout all our regions to make such heartwarming stories a reality for all families looking for housing for their loved ones.

Community Options in Arizona Receives Employment Contract

On September 2, 2015, Community Options received final approval to provide respite, attendant care, and individual supported employment services in Arizona. Wendy Mahan moved to Tucson in September 2014 to start Community Options Arizona as Executive Director. She has worked tirelessly over the last year to build connections, develop the program, and get approval from the state. Since obtaining final approval, Wendy has already received 14 referral calls from the state. Wendy anticipates that she will begin serving the first individuals in October. We are excited to begin providing services to individuals with disabilities in Arizona and have them join the Community Options family!

Leadership Matters Conference Coming in October!

This year's conference is focused on leadership. Just as the leaders of our country have done, we gather this year at the historic Union League in Philadelphia to come together united in the commitment to advocate for people with disabilities, to be their protectors of freedom. As leaders, it is important to know the history, how did we get where we are now. How do we take the knowledge of the past and keep moving forward?

Community Options, Inc. invites you to join us for our annual conference to hear from national recognized speakers on topics including Leadership, Macro Change and Social Capital.

Community Options Expands in Pennsylvania to Serve Individuals with Disabilities in the Poconos

Daniel Cottrell is one of our many individuals we serve in the Poconos Region who has experienced significant personal growth since moving into one of our homes. When Daniel first came to us, he was very quiet, kept to himself, and had severe verbal and physical behaviors. Our Luzerne team worked hard to get Daniel the guidance and support he needed to feel safe and loved so that he could work on his social skills. Daniel's socialization skills have improved immensely, which resulted in Daniel going out into his community more frequently. Now that Daniel has been able to spend more time in the community, his attitude as well as his behaviors improved greatly. Today Daniel has transferred to a new home for a chance to continue his positive growth. Daniel is an amazing individual and is always striving to work on his goals in his home as well as the community. Daniel enjoys helping his roommate in his new home and is starting to show interest in obtaining a job or volunteer opportunity in the health care field. Daniel has made tremendous progress with the help of Community Options, and still continues to grow every day he is with us.

Community Options Utilizing Cutting Edge Technology to do Business

Community Options understands that technology drives business, which in turn improves the quality of services we provide to the individuals we serve. This year, Community Options has launched Office365 and Therap, two cloud based technology applications that are instrumental to our organization's ongoing success. Office365 has allowed us to provide greater service through seamless collaboration and communication among all Community Options' employees. Office365 has enabled staff to work more effectively and facilitate quality services for those we support. Therap, which is an online application suite for documenting, reporting, communicating, and billing, will significantly improve the quality of services provided and streamline the paperwork for staff so that they can spend more time supporting individuals and helping them meet their goals.

Michael Lewinsky has joined Community Options as our IT Director who will be overseeing such technology initiatives to strengthen our regional offices' operations so that staff can spend more time where it matters most, with the individuals we serve.



Save The Date
Saturday, February 13, 2016

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Community Options' Barrier-Free Home Project a Success

Several years ago, the Community Options Amarillo office decided to create a barrier-free home environment that provided the best setting to encourage anyone with any range of disability to engage in daily living routines without architectural impediment. By providing wider hallways and open floor plans, a barrier-free home enables people with diverse disabilities to live in an environment that is best suited to their needs. These houses are in residential

neighborhoods and look like every other house in the community. The Amarillo Barrier-Free Home Project was developed by Texas, Arizona and New Mexico Regional VP Chandy Davis, who at the time was the Executive Director of the Amarillo office.

The first home opened in 2010, and its success continues to help people of all ranges of abilities. In 2011, the second house opened with only minor modifications that

were learned from the development of the first home. In August 2014, the third house was opened and as of February 2015, all three houses are full and supporting 12 individuals. These houses have been unique in the Amarillo area and are very popular with guardians and state representatives, so much so that we are expanding the project to other regions in Texas, such as Corpus Christi.

STEP: Exploring the World of Work

Transitioning a young person with IDD from the school system requires a holistic approach. It takes a team effort to achieve success. Parents and educators can depend on Community Options to be part of that team to help build a bridge between school and adult life for the child with IDD. Our approach is always person-centered and respectful of an individual's needs, talents, and goals. Employment is an important part of life for most people. Transitioning from youth to adulthood is difficult. Through STEP, Community Options is assisting students in identifying career goals through a range of experiences that can lead to meaningful community-based employment. STEP provides students with real world, hands-on training. We assist school districts by offering a customized program that facilitates the successful implementation of required transition services. Students are placed in a job rotation, where they get to sample various

community-based work experiences while receiving job skill development, and job placement assistance. We currently operate STEP in New Jersey, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

September started a new year for NJ STEP with the first rotation of work underway for 40 participants. We have new partnerships with local businesses, such as Merwick Care & Rehab, the Plainsboro Public Library, Sports Authority, and Walgreens. In addition, the STEP program has expanded to the Wayne area in Passaic County where it is set to begin services in late September. STEP SC is pleased to recognize Supported Employment Coordinator, Anthony Thompson and a STEP participant for being invited to speak about the STEP program before the Commissioner's Board Meeting of the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. We are also proud to congratulate two winners from the Mayor's Committee on Employment for

Persons with Disabilities: Tyler, a first year STEP participant, who was awarded the Employee Achievement Award and Kroger, a participating business, was presented with the Employer of the Year Award.

The Pittsburgh STEP program has partnered with Kane Regional Center Nursing Home, which is proving to be very rewarding for participants in the STEP program and the residents. This partnership puts smiles on the faces of Kane residents and gives STEP participants a chance to engage in a rewarding and positive social environment, the ability to learn new skills, and make a difference in the Kane community.

Community Options is continuously seeking to expand its STEP program to new regions so that students transitioning out of school may find meaningful and engaging job skills training that can lead to employment opportunities they enjoy.

Passion Is Infectious: Introducing San Antonio's New Executive Director, Monica Mendiola

Monica Mendiola, the new Executive Director of San Antonio, brings high energy, passion, and enthusiasm to Community Options. Although Monica is new to her Executive Director role, she has been with Community Options since 2014. During this time she has progressed from Quality Assurance Director to the Program Director for San Antonio residential programs, to her current leadership role. What is the secret to her success? Monica is deeply committed to serving individuals with disabilities which fuels her tremendous energy and enthusiasm.

Continued on page 4

Community Options' Youngest Executive Director Taking Philadelphia Region to New Heights

Community Options' Executive Director, Nick High, is working hard at increasing our housing and day program services to individuals with disabilities in the Philadelphia region. Nick began working with Community Options as a direct support professional immediately after graduating from Temple University in 2011. He worked in the supported living department which entailed providing supports to individuals living in their own apartments and assisting them to maximize their independence. In less than a year, Nick was promoted to Program Specialist over the supported living and supported employment departments. He spearheaded quality assurance initiatives which strengthened Community Options' relationship with the counties throughout the region. Additionally, in December of 2011, Nick oversaw the development of the community based day program, which was launched as an alternative to center based day programs as many of the individuals in the region's homes were deemed "too

challenging" for other agency's day programs. In 2012, Nick was promoted to Quality Assurance Coordinator where he became responsible for ensuring quality programming via auditing and conducting staff trainings. In this role he worked to ensure all records and systems were up to par. Nick also contributed to the opening of the Lehigh and York offices in Pennsylvania. In 2013, Nick was promoted to Assistant Executive Director over the southeastern PA region where operations had doubled in size.

The Southeastern PA region opened, in 2014, their new office in Northeast Philadelphia in order to support the tremendous growth happening in the region. By late 2014 one new home was being opened per month and the region was admitting one new supported living individual per month. While much of the focus often falls on the growth of the residential program in Southeastern PA, the supported living program tripled in size since 2011.

In April of 2015, Nick was officially promoted to Executive Director over the Southeastern PA region. The region's 20th home and 40th residential site overall including supported living, was opened in August. This past September the Southeastern PA region opened a second satellite office in King of Prussia, with the first being in Langhorne, to better support our homes in Montgomery County. According to Nick, "Our growth is really due to two factors: successful audits and a willingness to take challenging individuals. Many of our new admissions are people who other agencies declined to support and we have welcomed these individuals in with open arms. Our whole region is proud to be the open-minded provider that gives people with disabilities a chance regardless of their history. We are able to support these individuals because we have such great staff and managers that buy into this philosophy of giving everyone a chance".

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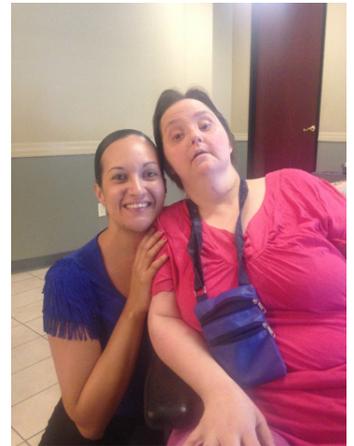
Continued from page 3

Passion Is Infectious: Introducing San Antonio's New Executive Director, Monica Mendiola

Monica is a born and raised Texan from Bruni, a small town in South Texas. She received a B.S. in Fitness and Sports with a specialization in Special Education from Texas A&M International University. Monica's professional experience includes educational programming for students with disabilities. She led regional efforts to implement a tutoring program for low income families with children with special needs.

Monica's strategic vision for San Antonio residential, employment, and day programs incorporates her strong background in educational programming. San Antonio programs integrate rich, varied opportunities for learning including social activities, field trips to museums and libraries, and cooking classes. Monica is resourceful and uses staff talent to make the budget stretch.

Monica has shown us that passion is infectious! Her commitment energizes and motivates her staff to keep giving. San Antonio staff often volunteer additional time and donate items for individuals we serve. We are excited to see where Monica's passion will take us next!



Supporting Good Nutrition

Community Options goes above and beyond to promote the health of the individuals we support. Improving quality of life is our focus. Four years ago, we recognized a need for nutritional services. This value added service is not a requirement, rather a service that we feel is vital to increase well-being.

During her tenure at COI as Dietitian, Cynthia Mlodzienski has implemented many nutrition education initiatives. Cynthia begins with a nutrition assessment and uses food models, measuring cups, and available foods in the home to make her education sessions fun. She plans meals for the homes and compiles grocery lists of healthy foods based on individual preferences and special dietary needs.

Cynthia is motivated by the fact that adults with I/DD are at greater

risk of suffering from obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, nutrient deficits, and concerns closely related to dietary intake. Cynthia says, "Nutrition care does play a vital role for consumers with I/DD. There is no denying the challenges, however, with a thorough nutrition assessment, ongoing education and encouragement, the dietitian can make a difference."

Pennsylvania's Regional Vice President Brian Dion adds, "Meal time is the most important time for individuals. They look forward to their nutritious three meals a day, and by doing this we add to their quality of life." Here at COI we feel we should do something extra and this is one example of how we can provide new and innovative services to the individuals we serve.