

# CHOICES

December 2021



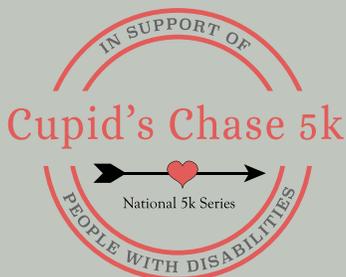
Community Options believes in the dignity of every person, and in the freedom of all people to experience the highest degree of self-determination. Embracing this philosophy, Community Options provides housing and employment supports to people with disabilities. #AllItTakes

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## Megan Crowley's Acceptance Speech Inspires Extraordinary Measures Gala Attendees

On October 12, Community Options presented Megan Crowley with the prestigious Betty Pender Award in recognition of her inspiring story of self-determination. Megan received the award at the Extraordinary Measures Gala at Heinz Field, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Joining her at the Gala was her family and Pittsburgh Steelers star Stephon Tuitt.

During her acceptance of the award, Megan gracefully addressed 300 guests with the following speech:

*Good evening - and thank you so much for that introduction. It is an honor to be with everyone and to accept the Betty Pender Award. I am truly humbled to be recognized in this way- knowing the remarkable achievements of the many past recipients.*

*Community. That word means simply: "a unified body of persons with the same interests."  
Or more broadly "a group of people who live in the same area."*

*And "Options." That word of course just means: "choices."*

*Abled bodied individuals and people without cognitive differences take for granted the ability to live, work and flourish among broader society. And to have choices for how, when and where they do so.*

*But for people living with these physical and cognitive challenges, there is often no community beyond their very narrow world. Traditionally for many, that meant living in institutions. And never having a choice.*



Guests left to right: Philip Lian, David Sweeney, Timothy Dunigan, Robert Stack, Megan Crowley, Ian Bogaty, Svetlana Repic-Qira, James Buckley

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I thank God each day that I was born in this time, in the place where we live and to a family of great strength, hope and joy. For it was not that long ago that someone living with Pompe disease, or any severe disability, requiring full time nursing care and a ventilator to breathe, would have lived a life in a nursing home or institution. But oh how times have changed! And what a role Community Options has played in saving and changing the lives of so many.

Let me tell you the story of one such individual. And a lesson of how we each rise by lifting others.

Like me, this individual was born into a loving family. But a family who never expected to receive an often fatal diagnosis when he was a very young child. He would struggle with health ailments. He would require a wheelchair to move. A ventilator to breathe. He like me needed 24/7 nursing care- but unlike me he could not even move his hands, only his right thumb. His muscle disease, though, never affected his mind. He was tough, bright and precocious.

His parents fought to keep him in mainstream school. With much love and support, he made his way through public schools and graduated high school. But unlike his older siblings he did not want to go to college.

In another time and another place, he may have squandered his entire adulthood days away watching TV or playing video games. Going day to day alive, but not fully living. Not having a feeling of purpose or earned success. But instead he now works at a place called Vaseful Flowers, in Princeton, New Jersey. There he finds his purpose in working with others. In making dreams come true with wedding flower arrangements- or easing a family's grief with flowers for a funeral. Where he once dreaded even waking to another day, he now looks forward to his work. His days are busy and most especially he now sees in his life a renewed purpose: to help others and to be a part of a team. To build a sustainable business. This brings him much joy. And pride. Indeed, as was written in the book of Genesis: "God created man to work...." And work he does.

I share this story because I know it well. This young 23-year old man who works at Vaseful Flowers is my brother, Patrick. He, like me, lives with Pompe Disease. And his life is made immeasurably better through the work, love and compassion of each of you who are a part of the fabric of this wonderful tapestry known as Community Options. A place that can dream of and create a business like Vaseful. A place that can help others dare to dream- and never feel like they are a burden to society, but rather a vibrant participant.

Thank you again for this great award- and again for the remarkable work that you each do in support of Community Options. Love proves itself in deeds- and your deeds are many.

But thank you most especially to my brother Patrick. He has taught me more about the true meaning of true strength and courage, without ever knowing that he was teaching me and so many others along this journey into the unknown, and unknowable, that we all call life..... God bless you each.



Pittsburgh Steelers star  
Stephon Tuitt & Megan Crowley  
at Heinz Field, in  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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# Community Options' Brian Zhu Named Pelosi Scholar at Georgetown



*Pictured above: Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi and Brian Zhu*

*“My experience at Community Options was a tremendous opportunity to grow both professionally and personally. My focus on state and federal legislation and how it would impact Community Options’ operations further fueled my passion to fight social inequalities,” said Brian Zhu. “The work Community Options does is vital to ensure that people with disabilities are able to live inclusive lives in residential communities, just like you and me.”*

Community Options is proud to announce that Brian Zhu was named as a Paul F. Pelosi Scholar at Georgetown University. Brian began as an intern with Community Options in the Spring of 2020.

The Pelosi Scholars Initiative is endowed by Paul Pelosi and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. Known as one of the most prestigious programs at Georgetown, only ten students are selected each year from Georgetown’s Walsh School of Foreign Service.

As part of his application, Brian wrote extensively about his experience with Community Options. Brian conducted research and analysis on federal and state legislation that impacted people with disabilities. He was also the Project Coordinator for Autability NJ, a research grant funded by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities.

“My experience at Community Options was a tremendous opportunity to grow both professionally and personally. My focus on state and federal legislation and how it would impact Community Options’ operations further fueled my passion to fight social inequalities,” said Brian Zhu. “The work Community Options does is vital to ensure that people with disabilities are able to live inclusive lives in residential communities, just like you and me.”

Brian is currently completing his junior year at Georgetown’s Walsh School of Foreign Service. After graduation, Brian plans to pursue law school so that he can work to fight social inequalities through legal reform.

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# Meet Adolfo Alvarado: Community Options Enterprises' Newest Trustee



*Adolfo Alvarado, Trustee; Svetlana Repic-Qira, Executive Vice President; Phil Lian, Chair; Robert Stack, President & CEO*

*Adolfo explains, "During the pandemic, I found myself wondering how I could be of greater service. Community Options continued to provide individualized in-person care and support for the people with disabilities who needed them. I saw the impact they had on so many lives and I knew I wanted to be a part of that."*

Adolfo Alvarado joined the Board of Directors for Community Options Enterprises in June of 2021. With over twenty years of extensive auditing, financial analysis, strategic planning, and budget management experience Adolfo offers an added dimension to the board. In his current role as Senior Finance Manager at Stryker, Adolfo directs financial and accounting activities for the business' largest manufacturing plant within the global Joint Replacement Division. Community Options will leverage Adolfo's expertise, passion for service, and insights to drive thoughtful growth and operational efficiency. In addition to serving on the Board, Adolfo has joined Community Options, Inc.'s Audit Committee reviewing the \$269 million dollar financial statement.

Adolfo's decades-long friendship with Community Options' Executive Vice President familiarized him to the mission of Community Options. Adolfo's commitment is deeply motivated to the future growth of Community Options. Adolfo is impressed with Community Options' growth trajectory, its commitment to community-based supports, and persistence and innovation despite systemic challenges.

Adolfo explains, "During the pandemic, I found myself wondering how I could be of greater service. Community Options continued to provide individualized in-person care and support for the people with disabilities who needed them. I saw the impact they had on so many lives and I knew I wanted to be a part of that."

The board of Community Options welcome Adolfo as he helps forward our cause. He and his wife Eileen have been married for seventeen years. They have three children, who have a wonderful example in their father's service. Adolfo, a golfer, looks forward to meeting more fellow trustees, staff, and supporters outside of their "Zoom boxes" and on the links at Community Options' Phil Lian & Joan Mueller Phenomenal Golf Classic on May 23, 2022.

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# Gabrielle Dibonge's Journey

## From Maryland to Pennsylvania to New Mexico



Gabrielle Dibonge  
Executive Director, Santa Fe, New Mexico

*"I trusted that this was the right choice because Community Options genuinely cares for its people. Management pours a lot into staff at all levels, which makes us want to reciprocate. The leadership team has always explored my ideas and made me feel valued. The culture here breeds loyalty."*

Gabrielle Dibonge has never shied away from opportunities to grow as a person or professionally. This has certainly been the case throughout her tenure with Community Options. In less than two years, she has worked in three states. Her story shows the unique and exciting opportunities that can come from working at Community Options.

Gabbie first joined Community Options as a Coordinator of Program Services in Frederick, Maryland. She made her first move when she was promoted to Director of Residential Services in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Moving to Pennsylvania allowed her to be closer to her extended family.

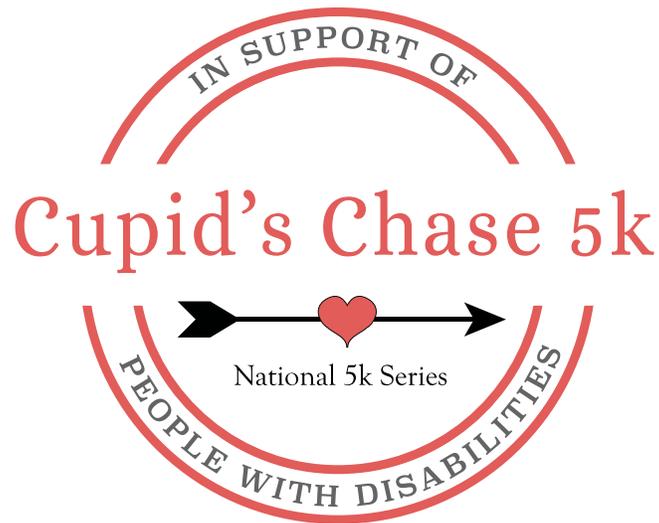
This fall, Gabbie was presented with an opportunity to become an Executive Director. However, the position was in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was a big decision for her being a mother with a young daughter.

"I trusted that this was the right choice because Community Options genuinely cares for its people. Management pours a lot into staff at all levels, which makes us want to reciprocate. The leadership team has always explored my ideas and made me feel valued. The culture here breeds loyalty."

"I'm happy to report that my time in Santa Fe has been wonderful so far. Hector Johnson and the leadership in New Mexico made sure my transition was seamless. They welcomed me into their state and introduced me to weekend activities to help my daughter and I build community. Since moving here, I have developed an interest in hiking, which is not surprising given the beautiful Santa Fe landscape."

Gabbie says she has always had a passion for working with marginalized and underserved populations. The opportunity to provide support to those who need it most has always been her motivation. We look forward to seeing our Santa Fe region grow under her leadership.

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Saturday, February 12, 2022

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