

CHOICES

— Summer 2023 —



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. #AllItTakes

SAVE THE DATE

Community Options' Gala
October 20, 2023

Gala Celebrating 35
years of Service

Union League of Philadelphia

www.comop.org/events/gala/

Jeremy's Journey to the Special Olympics

After facing significant challenges and the sudden loss of his mother, Jeremy found a new home with Community Options in September 2022. Since then, Jeremy's life has transformed, and he has thrived in an environment that empowers him to achieve his goals.

With the support and care provided by the compassionate staff at Community Options, Jeremy's health has improved significantly. He has not required any hospital admissions since moving into his new home, which is a testament to the safe and supportive environment he now lives in.

One of the most remarkable changes has been in Jeremy's mobility. He has experienced an increase in his physical abilities, which has allowed him to participate in the Special Olympics. Jeremy has found joy in competing in basketball and looks forward to exploring even more sports in the future.

Beyond the physical progress, Jeremy's emotional well-being has also benefited. Through the guidance of Community Options' staff, he has been able to rebuild his relationship with his father and brothers. The organization's person-centered approach to care has enabled Jeremy to discover his strengths and passions, leading to a more fulfilling life.

Executive Director, Timothy Hawk, proudly emphasizes the impact of the organization's approach, saying, "Jeremy's success is a result of the dedicated support from our caring staff, who work tirelessly to ensure his safety, happiness, and growth. We believe that every individual deserves a chance to thrive, and we are honored to be a part of Jeremy's journey."

Jeremy's success exemplifies the mission of Community Options to empower individuals with disabilities, providing them with the necessary support and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives and participate actively in their communities.

"Jeremy's success is a result of the dedicated support from our caring staff, who work tirelessly to ensure his safety, happiness, and growth. We believe that every individual deserves a chance to thrive, and we are honored to be a part of Jeremy's journey."



Jeremy is all smiles as he is ready to go out!



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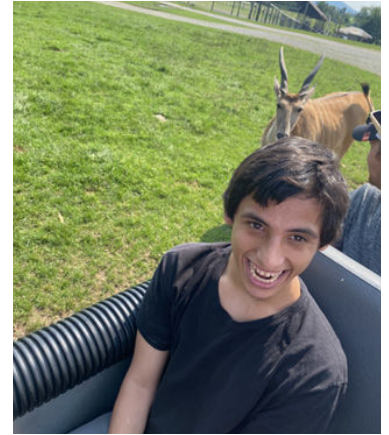
A Day at Lake Tobias with Drew

In the past, Drew has struggled with his emotions and aggression towards others. He has come a long way with stable staffing and building trust with the people around him. In the past year, Drew developed a close relationship with his support staff, Anyiah.

“There is not a direct way to word my relationship with Drew. I look at him more like family. He is someone I really care about. I love being able to put a smile on his face. Drew has become so much better with going out. While he still has his hiccups from time to time, that is normal for someone who was never really been exposed to a lot of things” Anyiah said when asked about her relationship with Drew.

They have worked together to pick out new experiences and things to do. They typically have at least one new outing or trip per day. Recently, Drew and his housemates visited Lake Tobias where he had the opportunity to interact with and feed the animals. He also went on an open-air safari ride during their outing. Experiences like this help his staff learn about the things he is passionate about.

Our goal for Drew is to provide a nurturing environment where staff, like Anyiah, help him achieve his independence and confidence. We are truly proud of his remarkable progress.



Drew took a trip to Lake Tobias where he enjoyed feeding the animals.

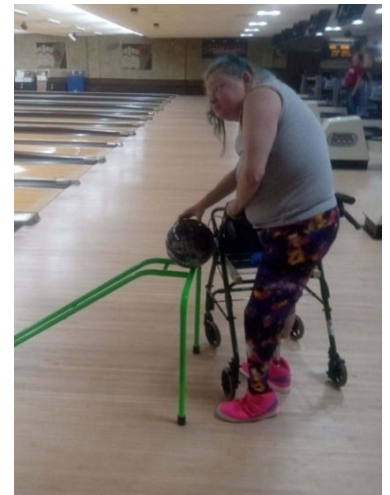
Kat's Independence

Ever since Kat moved to her Community Options home, one of her favorite activities is bowling. Kat uses a walker which made bowling independently difficult. The Community Options team in Columbia County worked with Kat to find a solution so that she could continue bowling with her friends.

Senior Direct Support Professional Amanda Brittingham and Jim, the region's maintenance staff, helped adjust Kat's walker to allow her complete independence when bowling. Until recently, she needed someone to get the ball for her and bring it up to the lane. Now, with the support of her walker adaptation and the alley's provided ramp, Kat can bowl independently.

“I have known Kat for almost 3 years, and I believe we have formed a bond that will last a long time,” said Amanda. “I allow her to make decisions for herself and give her opportunities to continue to grow as a person. It is important to encourage those we support to gain as much independence as possible.”

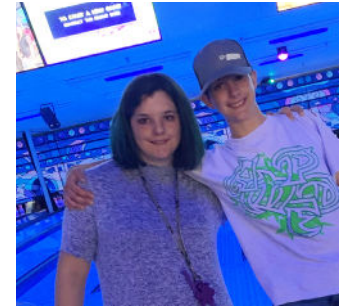
With the help of Community Options staff, Kat has discovered even more love for bowling. We are excited to witness her future accomplishments and all the wonderful things she will achieve!



Kat is hoping for a strike as she bowls using her newly adapted walker.

Twins Succeeding Together in Butler County

In the spring of 2020, the world was locked in the grasp of COVID-19. Businesses were shutting down and people were in desperate need of services. Our organization was contacted about a young woman who was being discharged from her current provider and was unable to return to her family home. Due to distance and pandemic restrictions, we were able to meet Kennedy and provide her with a tour of one of our homes through Zoom. We knew right away that all this young lady needed was the right environment and support, and that Community Options could provide her with the services she needed. Kennedy came to Community Options in May of that year, and fast-forward to 2023, Kennedy is thriving. She completed school and has been trying her hand at various jobs to find what's right for her.



Kiersten and Kennedy enjoying a fun bowling outing together.

Due to her success, her family contacted us in May of 2022 about supporting Kennedy's twin sister, Kiersten. Although Kennedy was 4 hours from home, their family knew Kiersten would succeed with us just as her sister had. Kiersten moved in as a shy and reserved young lady. She did not know how to advocate for herself. In just a few months' time, the reassurance and guidance of her staff have allowed her to blossom. Kiersten has become extremely independent and is finally experiencing self-determination.

“One remarkable aspect of Kennedy and Kiersten is that, despite being twins, their personalities are opposite,” said Tim Hawk, Executive Director in Butler County. “They have different interests, attitudes, and style. Their support needs reflect these differences, and the ability to recognize that helps us match support staff to their individual preferences.”

Terrance Thrives in his Community

Terrance has lived with Community Options since September of 2020. When Terrance first moved in, he was afraid of vehicles and going into his community. Over the years, Community Options staff have worked with him to overcome some of the fears and challenges that he was facing. Terrance now goes into the community frequently.

“Getting to know Terrance has been a highlight of my time here at Community Options,” said Brooke Smith, Executive Director for Washington County. “Terrance is an extremely sweet and caring man. He enjoys giving out hugs and kisses. Terry has the best belly laugh ever, and he loves to make others laugh with him and encourages dance parties. We are proud of his remarkable accomplishments.”

Terrance's confidence has also grown tremendously since he first arrived. He now joins his housemates and staff on tasks such as going grocery shopping and attending doctor appointments in person. This past summer, he attended a football game, the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, and the community swimming pool.



Terrance with a confident smile while out in his community.

New Training Program for Community Options Staff

Community Options was recently approved by the National Association for the Dually Diagnosed to provide training and certification for Direct Support Professionals. Through a grant provided by the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs, Community Options partnered with NADD to train and certify staff on supporting individuals with dual diagnoses. The first step in this process is to complete train-the-trainer sessions with our staff members in Pennsylvania. We selected a group of individuals with various backgrounds in leadership, training, and working directly with the individuals supported. The training took place in-person at Community Options' King of Prussia office and was led by Melissa Cheplic from NADD.



Michelle Horvath and Jackie

During this session, trainers learned about various topics on how to best support an individual with dual diagnosis and how to incorporate the following competency areas into their training: Assessment and observation, behavior support, crisis prevention and intervention, health and wellness, and community collaboration and teamwork. The training is anticipated to roll out in August 2023.

To be considered for certification, the applicant must meet the following requirements:

- Must have worked as a Direct Support Professional in the developmental disability or mental health field for at least one calendar year and complete 1000 hours of direct support work.
- Be an employee in good standing and sign the code of ethics.

Once accepted, staff can attend training with their local NADD trainer and then sit for the NADD certification exam. After passing the exam, staff will hold the NADD-DSP credential.

Community Options will be covering the costs of the membership and fees for the staff members along with offering a bonus for successful completion of the course. Eligible employees who receive approval into this program will receive a \$500 bonus in pay following completion of the certification. Employees who complete the program and remain active with Community Options will be eligible for an additional \$500 bonus six months after completing the program.

At Community Options, we firmly believe that investing in the professional development of our staff benefits both our team members and the individuals we support. We are committed to providing the highest quality care and support, and this new training program represents a significant step in furthering our mission.

We look forward to witnessing the positive impact of this training on both our staff and the individuals we serve as we continue to build a more inclusive and supportive community together.