

# Visions

WINTER 2017

A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS OF OPPORTUNITY MATTERS INC.

## Reflection of 2016

*Regan Stommes, CEO*

Another year has come and gone. As I sit here writing this, I remember how as a child, adults would tell me that the years go by faster the older you get. I am starting to believe that those adults knew what they were talking about. As a child, I remember long Christmas vacations and endless summers. Now, like many others, it seems that I have barely put the Christmas decorations away and we're celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. So for my benefit in acknowledging that all 12 months of 2016 did indeed happen, I wanted to take this opportunity to look back at some of the wonderful things that happened at Opportunity Matters over the last year.

First off, 2016 was an exciting year for Opportunity Matters. We not only welcomed back our dedicated Board of Directors in January but we continued to see growth in the numbers of individuals served in our consulting and adult day programs. We celebrated countless successes and progress with our individuals served as they worked towards their goals and life choices. Our big organizational events (Spring Fling, Great Get Together, etc) were deemed a success with high numbers in attendance and outcomes of happiness and enjoyment.

We were all jubilant when we went through licensing with the Department of Human Services on the new 245D regulations that were being reviewed for the first time, and received zero citations. This means that not only were all the new rules and regulations interpreted, adopted and rolled out correctly, it means that we had every "i" dotted and "t" crossed. That alone says a lot about the dedication and efficiency of our staff in delivering quality care.

In 2016, we also opened our 18<sup>th</sup> residential home, serving a challenging individual that the State of MN granted a bed for; to be served outside the St. Peter State Psychiatric Hospital. The new site was licensed at the end of July and the individual moved in August. Due to moratoriums on group homes, this was the first new residential home for OMI in about nine years.

Our employees are always a reason to reflect fondly and 2016 was no different. OMI grew to 300 employees and held an employee appreciation event that was well attended with positive feedback. Our payroll, finance and HR departments successfully completed a full year with new software for our financials, payroll and HR systems. Learning a new computer system is never easy and when dealing with numbers and confidential information there is a lot of stress that comes along with it. The departments all did beautifully and are enjoying the added features and ease of use that the new systems offer.

Our Twisted Twilight event, held in October each year, raised over \$7,000 for the Jim Christensen Endowment Fund! In its ninth year, our annual fall fundraiser not only raises funds but also creates awareness in the local community of the services that OMI provides.

With all of our success in 2016, we also had to sadly say goodbye to a few of our individuals who passed away during the year. We were very fortunate to be part of their lives and were grateful for the Celebration of Life services that were held at our main office so other individuals served in the organization could say their goodbyes. One individual had lived with Opportunity Matters for over 20 years and passed away peacefully in her own home at Foster 4 where she had lived for 16 years. In addition, Opportunity Matters rallied together to support our Foster 3 individuals and employees when a long-term employee unexpectedly passed away. It is not only the organization's mission, but also our common belief as employees of Opportunity Matters to empower lives and make a difference, both with our individuals served and our fellow coworkers. It is during these rough times that we see that common belief and mission shine.

So as we settle into 2017 and prepare to once again watch the months fly by, I am going to take a moment each day to acknowledge what that day brought me. If it be good or bad, it is my hope, that by the end of 2017, I will be able to capture even a small piece of the endless days we all experienced as children. Best Wishes!



## Remembering the Gh'oul Times

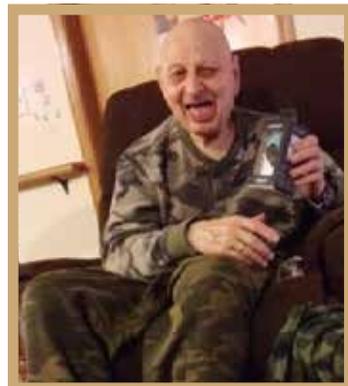
*Twisted Twilight Committee*

The ninth year of Opportunity Matters' Twisted Twilight fall fundraiser, held October 28<sup>th</sup>, raised over \$7,000 for our Jim Christensen Endowment fund! Once again this year, the event was held at the beautiful Regency Plaza in downtown St Cloud where guests were treated to a meal by Short Stop Catering and entertainment by Jared Sherlock of GL Berg Entertainment. From 6:00 – 10:00 attendees networked, laughed and participated in contests and drawings. Thank you to everyone who attended our event!

Thank you to the following individuals and businesses for their donations to our 2016 Twisted Twilight:

- Bremer Bank
- DeZurik
- Netgain
- CDI
- Flagship Insurance
- Crown Press
- MN Computer Systems
- Boulder Tap House
- P.M. Wierzbicky
- Anonymous
- Joanne Seifert & Sharon Sandberg
- MCI
- BergankDV
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- 360 Chiro
- Vital WorkLife
- GL Berg
- Grizzlys
- Erberts & Gerberts
- Joan Berth
- Rick & Marlene Schlichting
- Dale Jacobson & Dana Laudenbach

And to all the area liquor stores and individuals who donated wine for our wine pull. ■



## Laughter Abounds

*Bri Sullivan, Program Coordinator*

Stop out at Foster 4 and you most likely will be greeted by laughter and music. In 2016, Foster 4 welcomed Ken to the home and since his arrival, laughter and music is a daily occurrence. John, Carol and Bill were excited to meet their new housemates and gave him a warm welcome to the home. John works during the day so he misses out on some of the hijinks that Carol, Ken and Bill enjoy. All retired, the three have become fast friends. Although the three all enjoy their own hobbies (Carol enjoys puzzles and reading, Ken enjoys music and old movies and Bill enjoys old tv shows and comic books), together the laughter and good times abound as they interact throughout the day with each other, staff and visitors. ■

# Supported Apartment Services – Our Final Steps

*Sam Pierskalla, Program Services Director*

Opportunity Matters continues to move forward to the development of the Supported Apartment Services. In October, two individuals who each currently live in two of OMI's Adult Foster Care homes toured an apartment complex on the west side of St. Cloud and found it to be a place they would like to live. The apartment complex has the amenities they would enjoy and is close to a bus line so that they can utilize public transportation. Like many new adventures we ran into something we didn't expect. Because the two individuals have no rental history, they now need to find co-signers for them to be eligible to rent. This would only be for a temporary period of time until they become established renters. Currently, we are working with the individual's teams and the property management companies to determine what options are available. We are hoping to have this resolved within a month.

As we move forward with figuring out the co-signer situation we continue to discuss with the two individuals and their team members the plans for the move. This comes in the form of what staffing support they will require at first and what would be needed once they are established and settled in. What household supplies and furniture they will need to obtain? Will they have apartment roommate rules? Overall, this process has been going fairly smooth and everyone who is involved in this transition has been very supportive of the two individuals' progress toward independent living.

The final steps of securing an apartment unit is near the end once we figure out the co-signer issue. The two individuals are very excited and determined to be successful in their own apartment and this new adventure in life. If you know of someone who would like to learn more about Opportunity Matters supported apartment services please contact Sam, Program Services Director, at (320) 240-1900 x 206. ■

## Time for a Change

*Ashley Angevine, Lead Support Staff, Sterling Heights*

The Halloween party at Opportunity Matters is an event that the individuals at Sterling Heights look forward to all year. They love dressing up, trick-or-treating, visiting with friends, and of course, eating pizza. This year, the individuals at Sterling Heights asked if they could dress up as something different rather than wear the same costumes year after year. However, deciding what to dress up as for Halloween is not a decision to take lightly. After bouncing around a few ideas, the individuals made their decisions.

For many years, Colleen and her housemates enjoyed watching her favorite game show: Wheel of Fortune. After some thought, Colleen decided she wanted to dress up as the game show for Halloween. Staff crafted the Wheel of Fortune wheel out of cardboard and construction paper, added some glitter and a few lose-a-turns. She was then ready for a prize puzzle. Once Colleen was satisfied with the wheels, they were zip-tied to her chair and she was ready for the party.

The individuals and staff then had to come up with costumes for Jane, Sara and Andy. We tossed around a few ideas before settling on Jane being Thing 1, Sara Thing 2 and Andy The Cat In The Hat. Jane and Sara fit the bill of Dr. Seuss's Things because they like to have fun, laugh and, on occasion, get into mischief. Jane and Sara wore tutus and t-shirts that had "Thing 1" and "Thing 2" on them and sprayed their hair blue. Andy is much like The Cat in The Hat in many ways because he enjoys making people laugh, is creative, and loves wearing a bowtie. He wore a black shirt with a white belly, the Cat's bowtie and hat, and had a tail tied onto his wheelchair. The trio won first place in the group costume contest.

Colleen, Andy, Sara and Jane are incredibly grateful to the staff at Opportunity Matters and the wonderful volunteers that make this event possible each year. ■



## Always On the Go

*Harold Alexander, Program Coordinator*

Late this summer, Lance or LJ as he prefers to be called, moved into Opportunity Matters' Foster 6. LJ attends school during the day where he is finishing high school. When not at school, he spends his free time playing adaptive soccer for the St Cloud Area adaptive soccer team and recently started playing adaptive hockey. He shares a love of music and video games with the rest of his housemates so there is rarely a quiet moment around the house. LJ is quick on his feet and always has a response for staff. As LJ settles in, we look forward to seeing him at upcoming organizational events. ■





## A Year of Giving

*Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager*

2016 was the third year Opportunity Matters administration and supervisors participated in the organization's community involvement program. This program was developed for Opportunity Matters employees to give back to our local community while enjoying team building and a fun experience. In 2016, Opportunity Matters employees volunteered over 107 hours between the following organizations:

- The Boys and Girls Club
- Independent School District #742
  - The Salvation Army
  - Quiet Oaks Hospice
- The Tri-County Humane Society
  - The American Red Cross
- Country Manor Senior Campus

Depending on where they volunteered, OMI employees helped with card making, bell ringing, mock interviews, wrapping gifts and assisting to make holiday parties a success. ■

## A Time to Come Together

*OMI's Holiday Party Committee*

Opportunity Matters hosted its annual holiday party on Friday, December 9, 2016 at the Holiday Inn in St. Cloud. This year, we asked families:

“What does the holiday party mean to your family?”

Rick Stewart's family looks forward to OMI's holiday party each year. It is where they can all get together and do something that is just for Rick. They love watching him laugh and dance, and having the opportunity to dance with him. They enjoy watching the other individuals served by OMI dance and smile and interact with each other. It is a night where his family doesn't have to worry about cooking and instead can concentrate on having a good time with Rick. Rick as well enjoys the holiday party with his family. He is very close to his family and loves to see all of his brothers and sisters together at one place. He also likes to show them his fancy dance moves!



Lance Topp's family looks forward to the holiday party because it gives their family and Lance the opportunity to be together in an environment where Lance feels comfortable. The family enjoys the food, watching Lance dance and to see the joy he experiences in showing his family off to other individuals while telling stories along the way. Also, they would have a hard time forgetting about the party since Lance is so excited for the party, that he talks about it for a month prior! He greatly enjoys the party and all the music and dancing.

Opportunity Matters would like to thank everyone who attended our 2016 holiday party. ■



## A New Face at Foster 7

*Tonya Gerads, Program Coordinator*

Can you name every movie John Travolta starred in? If not, give Grace, our newest individual at Foster 7, a call. Grace loves John Travolta movies, cats and everything having to do with the Wizard of Oz. Grace moved in late last winter and is working to acclimate to her new surroundings and housemates. Grace loves to spend her time reading, watching movies and flipping through recipe books as she watches the Food Network channel. Grace has recently started attending Opportunity Matters' events where she enjoys meeting the other individuals we serve. If you see Grace, stop and say hello. ■

# Leadership by Example

Brenda Groseclose, Program Director

What makes a great staff? What makes a great leader? These often go hand in hand. Great leaders lead by example and inspire their staff to greatness. We are fortunate at OMI to have many great leaders and staff. Dionne Rowles, the program manager at Foster 3 is one such example. She has worked at Foster 3 for 16 years. She recently had to hire her first new staff in 8 years. That kind of retention is just one indication of the fantastic environment she has created at that home which makes staff want to stay. Dionne has truly embraced person-centeredness and has always ensured that the guys who live at Foster 3 know their rights and advocates for them every day. She leads her staff in doing this also and sets a great example for them. Her staff trust and respect her and it shows in their dedication and the great work they do.

Leslie Faulk is another shining example of a leader. Leslie works at Sterling Heights and demonstrates so many of OMI's core values. She is always pleasant and welcoming; she is dedicated and shows great commitment. She will jump in and help out, not just with the individuals who live at Sterling Heights, but from other homes as well. In August, she went with the Guy's and Gal's club to Valleyfair event and helped to ensure that the individuals from Sterling Heights were able to get on all of the roller coasters and rides that they wanted to. She even recently spoke about her brother who lives with Opportunity Matters, at the recent OMI fall fundraiser, Twisted Twilight, and shared her and her brother's stories. Even though she works part-time at Sterling Heights, she is a true leader and mentor for other staff in that home and others.

These are just two examples of the wonderful staff we have working at OMI and how they lead, mentor and coach both the staff and the individuals we serve. ■

## New Faces in Pathway

Lisa Carlock, Program Coordinator



Stop by our Pathway day program and you will find individuals and staff busy completing individual goals, arriving or departing to somewhere in the community, or simply relaxing by playing a game or watching a movie. In 2016, you would have seen a few new faces attending the day program. Scott is one of those individuals and a hard fellow to

miss. He has an excellent sense of humor and you will most likely find him joking with staff.

Miguel is another new individual in the Pathway program. Miguel is non-verbal but greatly enjoys people and being social. He frequently makes up new sign language to represent his staff. For example, one staff member has a tattoo on her wrist. When Miguel wants the attention of that staff member, he points to his wrist. The staff have really enjoyed learning Miguel's new signs for them and getting to know all the new faces attending the Pathway program. ■



## Donations/Grants

We are grateful to the many individuals, families, businesses and foundations whose contributions are vital to the success of Opportunity Matters Inc. The following list reflects gifts received from October 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016.

### \$500

Judith & Douglas Moe in memory of Corey Moe  
Mary Grow  
Joyce & Tony Tillemans Fund of the Central MN Community Foundation

memory of Corey Moe  
Lawrence & Jean Cook in memory of Corey Moe  
Wayne & Carolyn Larson in memory of Corey Moe  
James & Karen Acers in memory of Corey Moe  
Elaine & James Pepin in memory of Corey Moe  
Kathryn Woodfill in

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Mike's Trim Carpentry  
Jeffrey & Barbara Nadeau in memory of Corey Moe  
Nichole Schlicting

memory of Corey Moe  
Bert & Mary Bailey in memory of Corey Moe  
David & Twyla Wilson in memory of Corey Moe

### \$100+

David Topp  
Richard & Patricia Lembke in memory of Corey Moe  
DW & ME Olson in memory of Corey Moe  
Marlys & Tom Gehl in memory of Corey Moe  
Gerard Stifter  
Dale Jacobson & Dana Laudenbach  
The K Foundation

Richard Visser  
Boy Scout Troop #106  
Stearns Electric  
JB Loebel  
Cynthia Grogan  
Deborah Malone  
Cheryl Gabbert  
Anonymous  
Beth Schmitz  
Amy Schaefer  
Brittany Davison  
Brenda Eggerth  
Brenda Groseclose

### Donations

Mrs. Betty Harstad in memory of Corey Moe  
The Jung Family in

### In-Kind

Carlson Cleaners



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# In Memoriam

of those we lost in 2016.



Joyce Larson  
(Foster 7)



Corey Moe  
(Manor 2)



Mavis Grundberg  
(Foster 4)



Joani Burton  
(Employee)

*“Those we love don’t go away,  
They walk beside us every day...  
unseen, unheard, but always near,  
still loved, still missed  
and very dear.”*