

Visions

SPRING 2016

A LOOK

AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS OF OPPORTUNITY MATTERS INC.

The Art of Being Neighborly

Rhonda Sargeant, Operations Director

Soon many Central MN residents will be found outside enjoying the lovely Minnesota weather. This is the time of year we gather with neighbors over bonfires or stop to chat while retrieving the daily mail. It is the season we take time to catch up with neighbors on what has been happening over the winter, how the kids have grown and what we are expecting to be popping up soon in our flower beds and gardens.

Opportunity Matters works to ensure our individuals, staff and sites are “good neighbors.” Guidelines are reviewed with all staff to ensure that we are doing everything we can to fit this definition. This includes such things as; picking up after themselves and individuals, driving slowly and cautiously, turning their music down when entering the neighborhood, what to do if a neighbor has a concern and what to do if a situation arises with an individual served while outside. All of these are discussed on a regular basis.

We have been fortunate at Opportunity Matters to have great neighbors surrounding our 17 sites. Many offer a wave and smile as they drive by. This act, though simple, goes a long way in making our staff and individuals feel like part of the neighborhood. We also have neighbors that rewrite the definition of being a “good neighbor” by going above and beyond.

One instance of this is our neighbor Dan Popp who lives close to our Foster 1 and 2 sites, in the Westwood, St Cloud area. Having lived next to these sites for many years, he has come to know the individuals that live at Foster 1 and 2 as they go out for walks. It is not uncommon for the individuals to stop by and visit with him as he works in the yard or for him to stop by at the homes. When one of the individuals served passed away, Mr. Popp attended his funeral. In addition, he also makes appearances at birthday parties and has even stopped by to drop off treats for the individuals.

One of our South St Cloud sites has a birthday party BBQ in the beginning of May each year. This BBQ is open to the neighborhood and frequently gets neighbors gathering around visiting. This home is also lucky to have neighbors who volunteer to help clear snow in the winter and volunteer during events.

This spring as you head out to enjoy the beautiful MN weather, we invite you to stop and say hello or give us that smile and wave. We’re always happy to hear how you and your family weathered the winter months and maybe you can help us identify the flowers popping out of the soil in our flowerbeds. We’ll see you in the neighborhood! ■



The individuals of Foster 1 and 2 enjoy visiting with their neighbor Dan Popp

Save the Date!

Mark your calendar to join us for these great upcoming events!

Opportunity Matters' Great Get Together

Sunday, June 5

Watch your mailbox for your invitation and more information about this annual event!

Warm Weather Brings More Opportunities

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

As the weather warms up in Minnesota, now is the time to get out and get involved by volunteering. Opportunity Matters offers a variety of volunteer opportunities, from assisting on outings to being a volunteer friend. There are volunteer opportunities to fit anyone's busy schedule. Volunteers can help out on an ongoing basis or even for a one time event. We are fortunate to offer many of our volunteer opportunities in the evenings or on the weekends when most of our individuals served are home. Here are just a few of our upcoming events and ways you can get involved.

June brings our annual Great Get Together event that always needs additional hands. This year, the event will be held on Sunday, June 5th and we will need people to run the welcome table, help hand out gifts, take pictures and assist with clean-up.



Volunteers are needed to assist with running games, taking pictures or sharing a talent such as face painting.



Camp 2015

Our Guy's & Gal's clubs can always use an extra hand. A day trip to Valley Fair is currently being scheduled which will require quite a few pairs of extra hands to pull off successfully. Volunteers will be matched with an individual to give them the extra attention and help them get the most out of the park. Staff will also be along to drive the vehicles and support the individuals served.

As we all look forward to the smell of freshly cut grass and warm breezes, we ask that you consider volunteering this summer and beyond. For additional information about volunteering with Opportunity Matters or for additional volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at www.opportunitymatters.org/volunteer1.

Advances in Technology

Finance Department

In 2015, Opportunity Matters began using an employee portal to assist employees with faster and easier access to their payroll and organizational information. Employees clock in/out through the portal which helps the organization's payroll system be more streamlined, more user friendly and allows employees the ability to access their payroll and employee information wherever they have internet access.

Onboarding an employee portal did mean a few changes had to happen. The biggest change on the employee's side was the change in the time clock system. Employees now must log in to the portal to punch in/out. This required every employee to set-up a username and password and periodically update it. Also, employees had to get used to going to the portal to gain information about the organization that they previously asked their supervisor and other administrative staff for. On the administrative side, the introduction of an employee portal streamlined payroll services eliminating the need for the payroll department to export information from one system to the next. The new system also helped to eliminate extra paper by allowing supervisors to seamlessly edit and adjust employees missed punches, approve time off and submit time sheets to the payroll department electronically.

Opportunity Matters is currently taking the next step in streamlining payroll by introducing a pay card system for those employees who are unable to utilize the direct deposit services. Rather than receiving a live paycheck on pay days, employees' pay is loaded onto a pay card. This card will work as a debit card for employees to use when making purchases and eliminate them having to go to a bank to cash their check.

As technology continues to advance, Opportunity Matters is excited to give employees more accessibility and flexibility while continuing to streamline operational processes. ■



Twisted Twilight

Whose Job is it Anyway?

Visions' Newsletter Committee

Each quarter a Vision's newsletter hits your mailbox but have you ever wondered how the articles that appear in the newsletter are chosen?

Since the 1st Visions newsletter went to press way back in 2007, a committee has been the driving force to determine which articles should be included, assigning writing those articles to employees or community members and then editing the articles. Though it might seem like a pretty easy task, one would be surprised by the amount of teamwork that goes into producing one colorful and interesting newsletter. It takes the skill and experience of everyone from our direct care staff to our administrative staff to contribute and put forth a successful newsletter. The organization has found, that by using a committee to oversee the newsletter, this large task is easier to accomplish and produces a better quality newsletter for our community.

The Vision's committee is always looking for ideas and suggestions to make the Visions newsletter an interesting and educational read. If you have suggestions for the committee please feel free to contact us at info@opportunitymatters.org. We would love to hear from you! ■



The Vision's Newsletter Committee (from left) Brenda G., Becka K., Brenda E., Bridget M., and Regan S.

A Choice for Independence

Brittany Wright, Program Coordinator



Connie continues to work on her cooking and baking skills in an effort to reach her goal of moving to her own apartment.

People come in all shapes and sizes and so do our choices in where to call home. Some prefer big houses with large lawns while others prefer the simplicity of apartment living. Whatever your living preference is, central Minnesota has options to keep everyone safe, happy and part of our growing community.

A new living option is quickly becoming available for individuals with disabilities. With the introduction of supportive apartment living, Opportunity Matters is seeing many of our individuals who have dreamed of living on their own excited to take this next step.

Connie is a very independent woman and demonstrates many of the skills she needs to be on her own and is currently taking the steps to learn more skills that would increase her ability to thrive in that setting. She takes very good care of herself and does so with very little direction from staff. The things that she is working on now include; expanding her cooking and baking abilities, learning how to manage emergency situations that may arise when living independently and learning when and whom to call for help. The staff is just as excited as Connie for her to continue to learn and grow and help her accomplish this dream of living on her own in a supportive apartment setting.

But living alone is not for everyone. While some enjoy the quiet and calmness that living by yourself can bring, others prefer to socialize and feel more comfortable as part of a group. Some individuals that Opportunity Matters serves, even though they may be very independent in some areas, prefer a more social living situation. Interacting with housemates and staff offers them an opportunity to connect with others. Some individuals simply need more assistance and reminders from staff to do the things that keep them healthy and able to thrive. These tasks maybe include such things as; hygiene tasks, smart diet choices, and smart choices within their social circles. For these individuals, living in a more independent setting may not be the best choice for them and living in a foster home setting provides them with a healthier, safer and ultimately a happier life.

At Opportunity Matters, we want everyone to be happy with where they call home. We will continue to work with our individuals, our policy makers and our community to empower individuals to reach their full potential. ■

Quality Improvement Project

Brenda Groseclose, Program Director

In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature approved a one-time 5% increase in funding for the individuals we support at OMI. Part of this approval of the 5% was to also put in place a Quality Improvement Project. “The Home and Community Based services Quality Improvement Project is intended to encourage provider quality improvement efforts with the incentive of a one percent rate increase.” OMI developed a quality improvement plan to involve the individuals that we serve in more of the planning of activities that we provide to them each year through asking them to serve on planning committees. The committees that they are being asked to participate with are the Guy’s Club, Gal’s Club, Great Get Together, Spring Fling, Halloween Party and Holiday Party. OMI’s goal is to have 15% to 20% of the individuals we serve participate on a committee. OMI will complete a survey and hope to have 80% of those satisfied with being a committee member. OMI has received several replies so far from those who would like to participate. Those individuals who do participate will attend committee meetings and will help make the decisions regarding where we have the events, what activities we do at the events and even what kind of decorations and themes the events have. We are hopeful that every individual feels that they can have some positive influence on these events, even if it is as simple as choosing what kind of tablecloths we have at the Holiday Party by pointing at one or another if they are non-verbal. If this is as successful as we hope it will be, we would like to continue this in the coming years to keep the individuals involved in this fun and beneficial process. ■



As part of OMI's Quality Improvement Project, individuals like Carol will now be a bigger part of the decision making process for future OMI events.

Comfort & Safety in a Tub

Sandy Babcock Program Director



The new Parker tub recently installed at Foster 7.

Opportunity Matters’ Foster 7 recently received an OSHA Safety Grant to assist in paying for a new Parker tub to be purchased and installed in the home.

Last spring, Opportunity Matters’ Safety Committee recommended replacement or heavy modification of the home’s existing tub due to structural limitations that could reasonably lead to injury of staff or individual’s served. “As the individuals who live there continue to age, the current tub was no longer able to safely meet their needs,” Sam Pierskalla, Program Services Director explained. “Many of the individuals lacked the core strength needed to maintain themselves in an upright position in the tub which would result in the staff needing to reposition the individuals while in the tub. The safety committee recognized this as a potential for injury and wanted to act quickly to replace the tub with a safer option.”

Parker tubs offer state of the art safety for staff as well as comfort and safety for individuals that need assistance bathing. The new tub is height adjustable allowing for the tub to be raised or lowered to the individual’s level for easy access into and out of the tub, as well as having the tub at an ergonomic height for staff. The Parker tub is reclining which will eliminate the risk the individuals face due to lack of core strength. Once the individual is safely seated in the tub and the door is closed, a button is pressed and the tub is gently reclined. The Parker tub also offers an increase in safety by placing the power functions of the bath in a waterproof, touch sensitive controller at the head end of the tub.

The MN Department of Labor and Industry Safety Grant Program awards funds up to \$10,000 to qualifying employers for projects designed to reduce the risk of injury and illness to their workers. This is a matching grant with the organization paying for one half of the costs. By receiving this grant, Opportunity Matters was able to reduce hazards, better meet the needs of our individuals served and use the money saved to benefit other individuals in the organization. ■



Opportunity Matters takes pride in employing multiple generations across the organization.

Empowering Multiple Generations

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

From Traditionalists to Millennials, Opportunity Matters is proud to say our workforce is diverse and has dedicated employees that range in age from 18 (the minimum age to work at Opportunity Matters) to 73 years old.

We have found that employing this large of a span of age groups within a single organization comes with a lot of great value. Our older employees who have a strong sense of loyalty, dependability and sense of right and wrong work well with our younger employees who may be looking for someone to mentor them in the field. Likewise, our younger employees offer fresh ideas, a huge amount of energy and creativity and remind us all that one must balance work and life. Together the 55 year age span gives the individuals we serve and staff a valuable insight into life lessons and experiences.

With this age span does come some challenges. For instance, each generation has their preferred way of communicating. Where traditionalists prefer to have new ideas face-to-face with meetings and a lot of discussion, Generation X for example, prefers to keep meetings brief and to the point. Another big difference is the use of technology. As our world continues to become more and more technological, introduction of such things as an employee portal can be challenging for those who did not grow up with a computer in their house. This is where Opportunity Matters, like all organizations, must get creative in keeping a balance between those who request online trainings, Skyped meetings and a text message with those who value and need the face-to-face time. Opportunity Matters works hard to keep our employee base diverse, understanding all ages come with strengths that can only continue to make our organization a great place to work. ■

Growth of Applied Behavior Analysis Services

Nic Collette, Behavior Specialist

Those who are familiar with services available for persons with unique abilities have likely heard a lot about recent Minnesota legislative changes. These changes, which have been made in part as a result of the Jensen Settlement Agreement and Olmstead Plan, mandate that providers focus on Person-Centered and Positive Support strategies to improve the wellbeing of those they serve. Many providers have found these new standards challenging to integrate into their service models; occasionally asking whom they may turn to for assistance in making these visions a reality. For a growing number of families, schools, counties, and residential providers; Opportunity Matters has become a trusted source for help.

Opportunity Matters started its Applied Behavior Analysis / Behavior Consulting program in 2014, providing Functional Behavior Assessments to individuals experiencing challenging behaviors in their homes and communities. These services, and our behavior consultants, comply with both MN 245D statutes and national applied behavior analysis certification requirements. Since first opening the program, the number of persons receiving services has continued to rise as providers throughout the state begin to address the new requirements posed by these legislative changes. We look forward to serving more individuals throughout the state, and continuing to expand this quickly growing service. ■

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 January 1, 2016 to March 31, 2016.

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A Movement Towards More Independent Living

Sam Pierskalla, Program Services Director

Recently there has been a great deal of talk in Minnesota about individuals with disabilities living in the most integrated setting possible. The increase focus was driven from federal initiation of the Olmstead Act which required states to eliminate unnecessary segregation of persons with disabilities and to ensure that they are receiving services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. President Obama issued a proclamation launching the “Year of Community Living,” and has directed his administration to redouble enforcement efforts. The administration has responded by working with state and local government officials, disability rights groups, and with representatives of the Department of Health and Human Services. Together, they are working to fashion an effective, nationwide program to enforce the integration mandate of the department’s regulation implementing Title II of the Americans with Disability Act.

The concept of a person with disabilities living in the most integrated setting possible is nothing new to a majority of service providers. It has been taking place for a number of years and for a number of persons with disabilities. It is now that Minnesota and service providers are striving to assist a greater number of individuals to reach the goal of living more independently with the support of the Olmstead Act.

One way that Opportunity Matters plans to help those who wish to live more integrated in the community is with the development of a supported apartment program. This program is designed to have individuals live in an apartment by themselves or with a roommate and have support staff available up to 24 hours a day. The program will provide a balance between providing needed support with daily living skills but also increase a person’s independence. Individuals can have their needs met while enjoying being in their own apartment and making decisions on how they want to run their household. Opportunity Matters is currently in the process of finding an apartment complex that is secure, close to a bus line and has the amenities that will benefit those with disabilities. Once this is established the process will start with finding those who want and are ready to take the next step.

OMI is looking forward to offering this new supported apartment service program to help persons with disabilities reach their goals and further our mission of *empowering individuals to reach their full potential*. 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) 240-1900x206. ■