

Visions

SPRING 2018

A LOOK

AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS OF OPPORTUNITY MATTERS INC.

Summer is the Perfect Time

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

Summer really is the perfect time. What's not to enjoy about lazy days at the lake, campfires, walking barefoot in the grass and listening to the birds chirp? Summer is also the perfect time to continue giving back to your community and local non-profit organizations. Over the summer when schedules get busy and calendars get overloaded, the number of volunteers dramatically drops off, leaving communities and non-profits with a large number of opportunities that need to be filled.

This summer, while planning your visits to the lake and local parades, consider keeping volunteering as a priority. Many local events rely on volunteers to help make the event successful and can use an extra pair of hands to run logistics, take photos or help out with other tasks. Your local non-profits will also have a variety of volunteer opportunities where they need help. The volunteer opportunities at Opportunity Matters increase over the summer months due to the nice weather allowing for more community outings and more opportunities for socialization.

Frequently, volunteers are needed for an hour or two to assist on outings, for instance, pushing wheelchairs and taking pictures. People can volunteer for these opportunities one-time and are not required to make a reoccurring commitment to volunteer. What might seem like a simple task can make a huge difference in the lives of the individuals served by Opportunity Matters who greatly enjoy meeting new people while getting out in the sunshine. Many summer volunteer opportunities are also available for families looking to volunteer together or teenagers looking to build their resumes. For more information on Opportunity Matters' volunteer opportunities contact Brenda Eggerth at (320) 240-1900. ■



Social Slam Events

Drea Metcalf, Program Coordinator

In late 2017 Opportunity Matters started holding Social Slam events at our main office in Sartell. These events continue to be held periodically and offer individuals with physical and/or cognitive challenges a welcoming environment to meet new people, socialize and have fun. The Social Slam events are open to everyone including those living in foster care homes, living in the community or at home with a loved one. This is a great opportunity to make a new friend and learn more about our community and what it has to offer. More information on upcoming events will be posted on Opportunity Matters' website and Facebook account. Please contact Camden Scott, Lead Program Director with any questions at (320) 240-1900. ■

Upcoming Events:

Great Get Together

Wednesday, June 6th

Watch your mailbox for your invitation!

Guys & Gal's Club Brat Sale Fundraiser

(at Coborns on Pine Cone Road in Sartell)

Friday, June 22nd

Saturday, June 23rd

Friday, July 13th

Saturday, July 14th

Welcome Mary

Camden Scott, Program Director

Mary moved into Foster 5 in December 2017. Originally from Willmar, Mary has one brother and one sister, two nieces and one nephew. One of the amenities Mary was looking for, was a one level floor plan which she is enjoying at her new home.

Mary loves to be in the kitchen; baking, helping out or doing dishes. Once you get her out of the kitchen, you will find her enjoying some of her other favorite activities such as; cleaning, bowling and singing karaoke. She also attends Independence Center's day program three days a week.

Mary, the staff and her housemates are enjoying getting to know each other as she settles into her new home. They all enjoy the light heartedness Mary brings to Foster 5 with her wonderful sense of humor, love of joking around and having fun! ■



Stop the Habit of Procrastination

Opportunity Matters' Wellbeing Committee

According to Meriam-Webster, the definition of procrastination is “To put off intentionally the doing of something that should be done.” Sound familiar? Studies show that nearly 26% of the American public think of themselves as chronic procrastinators, up from 5% in 1978. As long-time procrastinators will attest, this deferral of something that needs to be done is rarely an isolated instance, and it usually occurs habitually and for trivial reasons. Believe it or not, the internet did not give rise to the problem of procrastination in society. Since the ancient times, people have struggled with procrastination and the impact our actions (or lack of) have in the many different areas of our lives including, health, finances and relationships.

The good news is that you have the power to change this behavior and take control of your life. Applying the old adage “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today,” is a good starting point in getting things checked off your to-do list. Below are five tips to help get you started.

- 1) Take 5 minutes to list out the things “you were going to do tomorrow.” Look at your list and do one thing on it right now.
- 2) Quit trying to be perfect
- 3) Break your task into little steps. Many times we find tasks overwhelming which cause us to not try and accomplish it at all.
- 4) Hang out with people who inspire you to take action. Identify the people in your life who motivate you (most frequently the go-getters and hard workers) and hang out with them more often.
- 5) Imagine how you will feel when whatever you have been postponing is done. Freedom from anxiety and nagging pressure will give you a boost of confidence and energy.

Essentially the only way to stop procrastinating is by putting your mind to it and taking action. You can do all the strategizing, planning and hypothesizing but if you don’t take action, nothing will happen. Keep in mind what Abraham Lincoln is credited for saying “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” ■

Sources: (1) www.investopedia.com (2) www.napavalleyregister.com (3) www.lifehack.org

Ready to Help

Mike Schmitz, Maintenance Manager

Warmer weather is on the way and along with that comes indoor spring cleaning and outdoor yard work. At Opportunity Matters, spring is a busy time of year, trying to get our main office and 18 residential sites ready for the summer. We are fortunate to have great vendors to rely on to help us out.

Carlson Cleaners does a great job in getting rid of the dirt that has accumulated indoors over winter. A number of services they help us out with include; cleaning carpets, furniture, mattresses and deep cleaning the interiors of our vehicles. We know to call on Carlson Cleaners to show up when cleaning is needed. Carlson Cleaners can be contacted at (320) 203-8862.

When its yard work that needs to be done, we contact Mike's Dirt Work to help us out. From cleaning up the leaves, mowing and seeding lawns, providing solutions to landscaping issues, and tree trimming, Mike's Dirt Work helps ensure our yards look the best. Mike's Dirt Work can be reached at (320) 493-7092.

As we welcome the warmer weather, consider contacting Carlson Cleaners or Mike's Dirt Work and let them help you get prepared for spring. ■

New Technology Redefines Independence

Becka Kurtz, Business Technology Manager

Society has been benefiting from advances in technology for hundreds of years. From the invention of airplanes and fire extinguishers to the introduction of dishwashers and movie projectors, our lives are continuously being redefined. The way Opportunity Matters serves individuals with physical and/or cognitive challenges has also been impacted by advances in technology.

Within our supported apartment program, advancements in technology have allowed for two new types of medication dispensing machines to be used. These machines allow the individuals using them to get their medications correctly and independently. Alarms notify the individual when it is time to take their medications. If a medication or dose is missed, the machine then notifies staff for follow-up. This is a great way for individuals to utilize technology to assist them in being more independent without the need for staff to be physically present.

New technology has also allowed for advancement in safety and comfort. It is not uncommon in the health care industry to use the aid of bed alarms for a person who is at risk of getting out of bed and falling during the night. New technology has advanced these old style bed alarms so now instead of setting off a piercing alarm if the person moves from the bed it sends a message directly to the staff. The new models are also capable of capturing photos when the alarm is triggered and will also send these to staff. This allows staff the ability to know what is happening in the individual's bedroom and if the person is safe, without disturbing the person.

Advances in technology have changed how information flows and how we communicate with each other. The internet allows us to have instant access to information and the numerous apps available now days can do anything from keep track of our grocery list to tracking the amount of steps we take and hours we sleep. Our individuals enjoy this advancement in technology as it allows them additional ways to communicate with their family members who might not live nearby. Where once the individual might have gone months without seeing their aging parents, the staff can now assist the person in video chatting with their loved ones or visiting via Social Media channels.

As technology and artificial intelligence advances it will be interesting to watch how our lives continue to be redefined and how delivery of services to the individuals we support continues to evolve. ■



The Importance of Soft Skills

Mickey Thern, Receptionist

Everyone knows that having the technical skills to perform a job you are applying for is important. If you want to be a doctor, you need to be able to show that you have successfully completed the training and education needed to be a doctor. But how often do you think about the soft skills that go into positions you are applying for?

While demonstration of technical skills may be enough to get your foot in the door, it is your demonstration of soft skills that will help to ensure new doors keep opening for you. Salesforce.com reports that 77% of employers say that soft skills are just as important as technical skills in their employees. Soft skills, defined as “personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people,” can include such things as; your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, and your emotional intelligence. These skills can be what set an employee apart from the rest of their coworkers and lead to a successful career.

Sample Soft Skills:

- Self Confidence
- Self Awareness
- Strong work ethic
- Accepting criticism
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Influence
- Being a team player
- Effective Communications
- Positive attitude
- Resilience

Much like technical skills, soft skills need to be developed and continuously worked on. Unfortunately, soft skills are not as easy to acquire as technical skills since they are closely linked to a person’s character. Through conscious effort, ongoing practice and a commitment to self-development, the results will be less stress, easier conversations and a happier day at work. ■

A Range of Diversity

Opportunity Matters' Human Resources Team

Opportunity Matters is fortunate to have a diverse group of employees. In addition to being diverse in cultural backgrounds, our employees are also diverse in their ages, life experiences and motivations for holding a position within the organization.

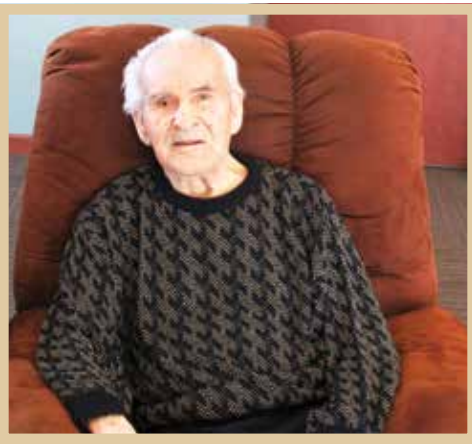
Opportunity Matters has both full-time and part-time positions, many of which offer benefits and additional training opportunities. By employing full-time staff, we can attract people who are looking for a career in this industry or who want to gain supervisory or leadership experience.

Opportunity Matters also provides a large amount of part-time positions. These positions are ideal for college students or those who work multiple jobs, since these positions offer flexibility to accommodate an already busy schedule. Some of our employees work other jobs that are not the typical 9-5 Monday-Friday positions, such as hair stylists or as a day care provider and they are looking for a part-time job that compliments their primary income. Opportunity Matters’ positions can often give that flexibility. Others have more traditional jobs working in schools, hospitals or in IT and enjoy keeping Opportunity Matters as a part-time job due to their attachment to the individuals we serve and a belief in the organization’s mission. We are fortunate to have employees who have held Opportunity Matters as their 2nd job for more than 10 years! Additionally, some people pick up a 2nd or 3rd job with Opportunity Matters for a short period of time, working a few hours every other weekend to save money for big events like an upcoming wedding or purchase of a house. Employees also have the opportunity to cross-train at other sites allowing them to “pick-up” additional hours.

Regardless of the reasons, the diversity in positions offered at Opportunity Matters can usually fit around anyone’s schedule. Please feel free to refer someone you think would benefit from a position with Opportunity Matters. For more information on positions currently available, or to apply, please visit our website at www.opportunitymatters.org/employmentandvolunteers. ■



*"I enjoy making a difference in other people's lives whether caring for them or bringing them joy. This not only helps them but also helps me to become the best version of myself".....
Cassie Siegal, Opportunity Matters' Direct Support Staff*



Frank enjoys relaxing while attending the Pathway Day Program



Richard recently shared his skill in cooking frog legs



Nichole is all smiles

New Faces in Pathway to Opportunities

Raeann Green, Program Coordinator

Stop by the Pathway to Opportunities day program and you might just be greeted by a number of new faces who have joined our program recently.

Frank speaks fluent Spanish and enjoys occasionally teaching the staff a few words. He is usually busy playing cards or relaxing.

Richard is a mover and a shaker and enjoys anything that keeps him and his hands busy. He loves to build things and recently cooked frog legs with another program attendee. Staff was a bit skeptical to try the frog legs at first, but was surprised by how good they were. Richard is already planning when he can fry frog legs again for everyone.

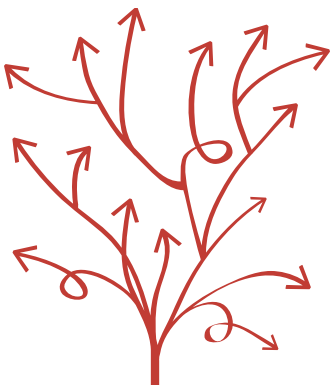
Nichole is our newest in-home client and is one of the most smiley people we have ever met. Besides her bubbly personality, she also has a big sweet tooth! She loves going out with staff for ice cream or pie with the most whipped cream you have ever seen.

We are excited to have these individuals join us in the PTO program and are looking forward to summer when we can get everyone out in the sunshine. ■

Helping Our Community

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

As the number of people staying at local shelters increases, the shelters stock of clothing quickly depletes. Opportunity Matters held a “Week of Giving,” offering the employees of OMI a great opportunity to make a difference and live out the organization’s core value of community “making an impact, being a part of and giving back.” During the week of February 23rd through March 2nd, numerous bins of clothing were collected at OMI’s main office and were delivered to Place of Hope. ■



Full Speed Ahead: Guy's & Gal's Club Activities

Guy's & Gal's Club Committees

2018 events have officially kicked off for our Guy's and Gal's Clubs. In February, 35 of the individuals served by Opportunity Matters attended a Valentine's Day Party to celebrate the sweet holiday. Those attending danced, sang karaoke and enjoyed tasty snacks and treats brought by each of the homes attending. The most popular songs to sing were "Let it Go" from Frozen and "Achy Breaky Heart" by Billy Ray Cyrus. Everyone received a goody bag filled with Valentine candy on their way out the door. Everyone had a blast and many said they "Can't wait for next year!"

At the end of March, the clubs had a "Baking/Movie Day Off Gathering" due to Wacosa; the workplace of many individual; being closed for a staff in-service. The gals headed over to Foster 8 to enjoy baking, manicures, crafts and a movie. The guys hung out at Sterling Heights where they also baked a few treats, played board games and watched a movie. Everyone came away from the gathering relaxed and ready for the weekend.

This summer the clubs will once again be participating in their annual brat sale fundraiser to raise money to support their activities. This is the main fundraising opportunity for the clubs and those who stop in for a brat and pop help to provide opportunities for those who may not be able to otherwise afford to participate in an activity. For instance, one of the individuals Opportunity Matters' supports loves the rides at Valley fair, especially the Wild Thing! Last year, he was able to use money raised from the brat sales to attend the Minnesota amusement park with the Guy's and Gal's clubs. He went on the Wild Thing about 25 times that day! This gentleman has Autism and the rides are not only fun for him, but also provide him with a great amount of sensory input. This would not be possible for him to do without the generous people who attend our fundraiser each year! Also this summer, there are plans for the traditional activities like the Twin's Game and Valleyfair as well as: fishing trips, going to a zoo and flower planting. It is sure to be a busy and entertaining summer for the Guy's & Gal's clubs of Opportunity Matters. ■



Gal's club enjoyed decorating cupcakes during their "Day Off Gathering"



Guy's club cooked up some good food to enjoy during their Day Off Gathering"



Everyone was all smiles at the Valentine's Party



Valleyfair is a favorite summer activity of the Guy's and Gal's Clubs.



Family Time

Bridget Mohs, Finance Manager

The warm weather months are a perfect time to get together with family members to enjoy all that summer in Minnesota has to offer. This year, consider meeting Opportunity Matters' staff and your family member, served by the organization, out in the community where you can get together for a short time to enjoy being involved in the community. This could be meeting for a quick walk around Lake George, a picnic at Riverside Park or browsing through one of the many local Farmer's markets. The individuals love to stay busy during the summer and enjoy many of the events and amenities that central MN has to offer.

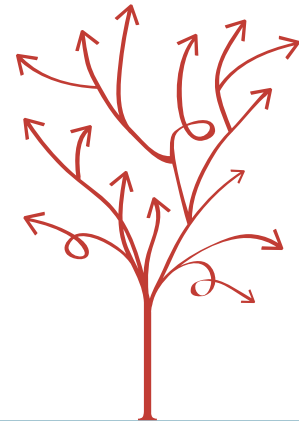
If you prefer to pick your family member up, consider scheduling a Girl's Day out! The ladies are always happy to spend the day getting pampered by having their hair cut or nails done and grabbing lunch. Many individuals are happy to tag along when running errands or stopping for a bite to eat at a favorite restaurant. Another great way to get active and spend quality time together is by inviting them to join you in a hobby such as fishing or going for a game of bingo at the local legion hall.

For those with limited time or who are located a distance away, a phone call or letter can brighten someone's day. The individuals served proudly display the cards and letters they receive and are excited to share when a family member calls. Advances in technology make it easier than ever to access social media or apps such as Facetime or Skype to communicate over a distance. Opportunity Matters' staff is happy to help the individuals set-up the necessary media to video chat and connect with their family.

Finally, mark your calendar to attend Opportunity Matters Great-Get-Together, scheduled for Wednesday, June 6, 2018 at OMI's main office in Sartell. This annual event is held to bring individuals and family members together to kick off the summer season and finalize plans to enjoy the amazing sights and sounds of a Minnesota summer. ■



Individuals enjoy spending time with their family members during OMI events



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, 2018 to March 31, 2018.

\$400

John Skalla

\$200+

Mike's Trim Carpentry

Donations

Amy Inglett

Mike Thern

Richard Conrad

Thomas Routon

If you are interested in making a donation to Opportunity Matters, please contact Regan Stommes, CEO at (320) 240-1900 x210.



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Opportunities through Internships

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

Opportunity Matters offers a variety of paid and non-paid internship opportunities throughout the organization for area college students. Internships offer students the opportunity to apply concepts learned in the classroom to a viable business environment.

Though not limited to, Opportunity Matters' paid internships are primarily pursued by students majoring in Psychology who want to gain exposure to working with individuals with physical and/or cognitive challenges in our day program or residential sites. Paid interns receive the same extensive training as other employees on the organization's policies and procedures, Human Services rules and regulations and the individuals served by OMI.

Another option students have is to complete a non-paid internship within Opportunity Matters' Administration offices. These internships are perfect for students seeking degrees in fields such as; Management, Operations or Human Resources. Human Resources internships are offered each semester and due to their popularity, are limited to one or two students each semester. Human Resource interns learn about different aspects of the HR field including; recruitment, screening, reporting, and understanding how rules and regulations are applied. Additional tasks such as filing, uploading and data entry are often part of the internship. We are interviewing for Summer HR internship positions at this time.

Regardless of the focus, internships are a great opportunity to make professional contacts and gain industry knowledge that can't be learned inside a classroom. Opportunity Matters is happy to be able to accommodate a variety of majors and the varying hour requirements. If you or someone you know is interested in either a paid or non-paid internship, please contact Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager at (320) 240-1900 or visit www.opportunitymatters.org/employeeandvolunteers. ■