

Visions

WINTER 2016

A LOOK

AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS OF OPPORTUNITY MATTERS INC.



A New Home

Sam Pierskalla, Program & Services Director

Opportunity Matters is excited to announce the development of a new home. What prompted this expansion of service was a request from a county to provide Adult Foster Care to an individual with some difficult challenges. We were excited to do so since in the past we had assisted the individual overcome many challenges and make progress towards more independence. The question then was “how can we meet this person’s needs, and where?” It



New site driveway to house

was decided that we would need to build a home that was specifically designed for the person and others who may have similar challenging behaviors. This included designing a home that allowed the individuals privacy and personal space while allowing adequate room for staff to separate themselves while maintaining supervision. We also needed a property where neighbors were a distance away, in Benton County, close to the St. Cloud area and a lot large enough to fit a four bedroom patio house. For several months Opportunity Matters looked at many properties and finally found a 1.6 acre wooded lot just on the outskirts of Sauk Rapids. The home was designed with the necessary amenities and currently the land is being prepared for construction and the installation of the septic system. The goal is to have the home built by early spring and the first individual to move in shortly thereafter. Future plans are to have four individuals live at the home. Though there are some names floating around, we are still in the process of naming the home. ■

More Time for Herself

Robin Kelash, Program Coordinator



Judy, an individual living at Foster 10, is vivacious and cheerful and retirement has definitely not slowed her down. Judy, who worked at WACOSA for over 20 years, is making the best of her time now that she is home more often. Judy enjoys spending her afternoons doing many things. She goes to the library a couple of times a week, each time renting a new romantic comedy and a book or two. Judy heads over to the YMCA weekly to use the pool and relax in the hot tub; she even has her roommates tag along sometimes. Judy has always watched her soap “The Young and the Restless” and now that she is home in the afternoons she likes to give staff a run down of the episode while she is having her after lunch coffee. When she is not reading her library books, making cards for her roommates and staff or watching her soaps you will often find Judy doing her hair or painting her nails. ■

Giving Back

Ingeborg Garbe and Christina Thiam, Program Coordinators

Community is one of the core values of Opportunity Matters. We encourage our employees to give back and are delighted when the individuals we serve do as well. Many of the individuals we serve frequently volunteer at the Humane Society, others give to Toys for Tots and in years past others have been bell ringers for the Salvation Army. This past fall, the individuals found a few new ways to give back.

Tim has lived in St Cloud his entire life. In fact, ask Tim how to get anywhere in St Cloud and he will know exactly the route to take. Tim enjoys getting out in to the community and helping out when he can. He was thrilled when the organization "Fishing Has No Boundaries" asked him to volunteer at their annual golf event. Fishing Has No Boundaries is a non-profit organization whose goal is to open up the great outdoors for people with disabilities through the world of fishing. At the golf tournament, golfers could pay to record a birdie for that hole or for a little bit more, an eagle. The volunteers then had to putt the ball in, regardless of the number of strokes it took them. After golfing, attendees and volunteers were treated to a chicken dinner catered by Short Stop where Tim gave a short speech thanking every one for attending and allowing him to volunteer. Tim said "The event was fun and I am looking forward to volunteering next year!"



This past year, Marleen, Sharon and Bernice were interested in trying a new hobby and decided they would like to try a Knifty Knitter and learn how to knit hats. They were matched with a volunteer Ellen, who was looking for a fun way to give back and enjoyed knifty knitting baby hats to donate to the hospital. Nearly 10 months later, Bernice, Marleen and Sharon have found a new favorite past time. If you stop by Foster 1 in the evening you are likely to catch the ladies in the living room with their knifty knitters. They even took them with to Summertime by George and would sit in their chairs and knit while listening to the music. Most of their yarn is donated by family & friends but the ladies did spend some of their hard earned money on embellishments. In November, Ellen and the ladies donated 5 hats and 10 scarves to the Salvation Army to help keep the homeless a little bit warmer this winter.

Opportunity Matters is proud of Tim, Bernice, Sharon, Marleen and all of our individuals and employees who are active in our community and give back when able. As 2016 gets underway, we are eager to see the creative and wonderful ways the core value of "Community" continues to evolve. ■



Empowering Lives

Brenda Groseclose, Program Director

The gentlemen of Foster 2 were excited to welcome Ralph to their home on June 1st. Ralph has been a great addition and knew a couple of the guys there after having worked with them in the past. Due to some pressing health issues, Ralph was on several strong medications which over time, can cause significant side effects and can build up in the system. The staff at Foster 2 did an amazing job of advocating for Ralph with his doctors and with persistence, were able to encourage them to reduce or eliminate several of his medications. When Ralph first arrived, he was sleeping on average, 20 hours a day. He had not worked in several years and was experiencing several serious side effects from his medication. As his medications were discontinued and reduced, these side effects have greatly decreased and in some instances have disappeared completely. Ralph's sleeping has decreased from 20 hours per day to around 10-12 and because of this, Ralph was able to go back to work. Ralph started working at WACOSA on October 5th, originally 2 days a week and at his recent meeting, increasing to 3 days per week. Ralph has stated many times how much better he feels and his family is thrilled with his progress. It is a true credit to the staff for their dedication, perseverance and commitment to help provide the best possible care for the individuals they serve. ■



A New Partnership for Opportunity Matters Inc.

Regan Stommes, CEO and Diana Beckers, Payroll/Accounting Clerk

Recently, the new FDIC coverage limits changed causing OMI to review its banking options. OMI currently banks with Bremer and is happy with their services. However, OMI previously utilized a couple of the Bremer branches to ensure the FDIC coverage was not exceeded. When changes in the banking world occurred, we were no longer able to utilize the different branches within Bremer as the FDIC limit was now for the entire bank and didn't differentiate between the branches. We sought out bids from several local banks and we are pleased to partner with both Falcon National Bank and Sentry Bank in addition to Bremer. We utilize the different banks for checking, savings, and mortgages. We found that some of the banks could offer more to OMI in regard to lower fees, higher interest earned and easier access to cash when needed.

Last fall, OMI began to work closely with the staff at Falcon to set-up our remote deposit system and learn how to use the bank's website. The employees have gone above and beyond to ensure our questions were answered in a prompt and timely manner. They even came out to meet with us and personally train us on their system. Their employees are always friendly, professional and willing to help out to make our jobs easier.

We are happy that all of the partners are open to us working with a couple banks to ensure that OMI is receiving the best use of its money. We appreciate all of the support that Bremer, Falcon and Sentry have provided to OMI including their friendly and professional staff, services and training. It's nice to have support of several of the local banks for OMI. ■

We Love Our Community

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

2015 marked the 2nd year that Opportunity Matters' employees participated in an organization sponsored community involvement program. All full-time employees were asked to commit anywhere from 2 - 4 hours at one of five chosen non-profit organizations around St Cloud and the surrounding communities. This year the chosen organizations included; the Boys & Girls Club, the Tri-County Humane Society, Country Manor Senior Campus, the Multiple Sclerosis walk (held in May), the VA Medical Center, and the American Red Cross. Throughout the year, a few projects the OMI employees completed included; donating blood, wrapping presents at Crossroads Center, volunteer check-in and coordination, cleaning Wilson park and making Thanksgiving decorations.

Aligning with our core value of community, Opportunity Matters started a community involvement program in 2014 for all full-time employees. As of December 31, 2015, OMI employees have given over 230 hours back to the community in addition to continuing with our Adopt-A-Highway clean-up twice yearly. ■



A Few Reasons Why We Love Halloween!

"Candy"

"Passing out candy to the little kids"

"Dressing Up"

"Trick or Treating"

"Everything!"

Why the Increased Focus on Person Centered Planning?

Opportunity Matters' Program Directors

Those involved with someone with disabilities may have started hearing buzz around “Person Centered Planning.” This concept, though not new, has received attention in the last year and left many guardians, providers and individuals served wondering what exactly “Person Centered Planning” entails.

To best understand this concept, one needs to look back to 1999 and review the Olmstead vs. L.C. case. This case begins with two women with mental illness and developmental disabilities who were voluntarily admitted to the psychiatric unit in a state run hospital in Georgia. Following the women’s medical treatment at the hospital, mental health professionals stated that each woman was ready to move back to a community-based program. The women however, remained confined in the institution, each for several years after. They filed a suit under the Americans with Disabilities Act for release from the hospital. On June 22, 1999 the United States Supreme Court held in the Olmstead vs. L.C. case that unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities constitutes discrimination in violation of title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. (source: www.ada.gov/olmstead/olmstead_about.htm)

On January 1, 2014, as part of Minnesota’s plan to uphold the Olmstead Act, Minnesota updated the rules and regulations that waived services are required to follow. Most recently, the Positive Supports Rule was passed and became effective August 31, 2015. These updates to the rules and regulations ensure waived service providers have policies in place to; reduce or eliminate the use of punitive and restrictive methods to control or change behaviors and increase staff training and oversight. Minnesota is working to assure that individuals with disabilities are able to exercise their rights and freedoms in the most literal sense; to be able to make choices that affect their lives on a daily basis.

As the State of Minnesota and the Department of Human Services continue to implement rules regarding Person Centered Planning, Opportunity Matters’ continues to work diligently to ensure all necessary policies and procedures are in place. Additionally, by January 1, 2017, all providers will be required to have a written policy ensuring that the individuals supported have the opportunity to live as independently as possible even though there may be risks in doing so. This may include allowing someone to have time alone in the community or increased time alone in the community and establishing a plan to help them achieve this successfully.

The focus of the Person Centered Planning and Olmstead Act is not to eliminate adult foster care homes but to ensure that support teams working with individuals with disabilities take the necessary steps to focus on the individuals wants/needs in life, develop plans to achieve those wants and needs while at the same time safeguarding them from harm or abuse. This is often a hard change to accept not only for providers and case managers, but guardians and legal representatives as well. Having worked hard to keep them safe from harm, it will require all of us to really look at what is truly necessary to keep the person from significant harm, not just the “maybes” or “what-ifs” that could happen. Having that second piece of pie; even though it might raise their blood sugar level or being able to go to the bar and have a beer, even though they are on medications which may cause them risk of harm. We must remind ourselves that we are allowed to have that dignity of risk in our daily lives and to take chances and seize opportunities to grow. There may be some mistakes, poor decisions and negative consequences from actions, but like all of us, these situations can be and usually are where we learn the most valuable life lessons. ■

Thank you to everyone who sponsored, attended, and volunteered for our annual Twisted Twilight event.

Final numbers are in and over \$9,000 was raised towards the purchase of an accessible van.

Save the date for our 2016 event: Friday, October 28!



Making Those Dollars Count

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

Opportunity Matters' donation campaign kicks off each January with the organization's supervisors creating a list of needs or wants for their site or program. Items on these lists can be a range of things but most often include items that the individuals served can use or provide entertainment such as board games, household items, and craft supplies. By early February, these lists are uploaded to our website (www.opportunitymatters.org/needs-list) and are made available for people who are looking to donate a specific item. People can also make monetary donations and direct their donations to a specific site or program. In late November, the dollar amount raised for each site and program is communicated out and the sites and programs are able to purchase any remaining items from their list.



Thank you to everyone who donates to OMI. If you would like to make a donation please contact Regan Stommes (320) 240-1900. Our 2016 needs list is in the process of being updated and will be posted in the beginning of February on our website. ■

What is Your Favorite Part of OMI's Annual Holiday Party?

This year at our annual holiday party we asked those in attendance to tell us what their favorite part of the party is. Below are a few of our favorite answers.

- Spending time with family & friends
- It's fun getting to know the staff members better as well as seeing other clients & their families (the food was delicious too!)
- Presents
- Dancing to Christmas music and watching everyone
- The food and cake
- The Music
- All the smiles

Thank you to everyone who was able to join us to celebrate the holiday season.



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, 2015 to December 31, 2015.

7,500

OSHA Safety Grant

500+

Joyce & Tony Tillemans Fund

200+

Mike & Maria Nathe
Mike's Trim Carpentry
Richard & Marlene Schlichting
Toby & Douglas Moe

100+

Gerard Stifter
Nichole Schlichting

In-Kind

Lynn Jacques
Carlson Cleaning
Regan Stommes
Kaylea Stier
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• Thank You •

Brian Hart
(presenting at staff training)

Kristina George
(presenting at staff training)

Cashwise Waite Park
(hosting Brat Sale)

Jody Bertram
(presenting at staff training)

All of our vendors who dropped off holiday goodies and snacks!

And to all of those who helped make Twisted Twilight a success:

Sponsors:

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