CHARLES RIVER’S DISCUSSION ABOUT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

In June, we held two virtual discussion groups regarding the Black Lives Matter movement specifically, and more generally about diversity and inclusion at the Charles River Center. Zohreh King, the Director of Family Support moderated these discussions as she has a background in facilitating such discussions. The group shared personal experiences with discrimination, their feelings about the BLM movement and the protests across the nation and offered personal perspectives on Charles River Center’s current diversity policies and practices. Those who attended the discussions thought that it was an important first step, but more was needed.

As a result of these discussions, the Charles River Center committed to the following action steps:

• Revise our policies on diversity and cultural relevancy.
• Hire a consultant to create a survey that would anonymously allow employees to share their experiences around diversity and inclusion at work.
• Evaluate our current diversity practices and develop a more comprehensive diversity plan.
• Establish a Diversity Council representative of the diversity of employees and persons served.
• Develop a written, transparent plan that will increase the numbers of minority owned business partners, board members, and senior leaders within the organization.
• Have all relevant information (brochures, disclosures, documents that require signatures of compliance) translated into languages of origin for any populations that have large representation among persons served.
• Offer regular in-person trainings that address culture, race, disability and experience differences. Trainings that address gender, language, and multi-cultural understanding were brought up specifically.
• Host an on-line calendar that denotes celebratory events and holidays that are recognized by other groups.
• Host town meetings (quarterly was mentioned) with different organization leadership and outside experts regarding how to be inclusive with those we support, fellow employees, and the community.
• Hold Department meetings regarding diversity on a regular basis and ask for action steps from each department.

Diversity and inclusion are core to the values of the Charles River Center. The recent Black Lives Matter movement has strengthened our resolve and we are committed to ensuring that these values are evidenced in our practices and the experiences of our employees and persons served.

THE TENTH ANNUAL CHARLES RIVER CENTER 5K RUN/1 MILE WALK IS GOING VIRTUAL!

In an effort to adhere to social distancing measures while keeping the tradition alive for the 10th annual Charles River Center 5K Run/1 Mile Walk, we are taking this year’s event virtual from September 20th-September 27th, 2020. This means that anyone can run or walk their own course anytime, anywhere from 8:00 am on September 20th through 9:00 pm on September 27th, 2020.

While we are disappointed that we will not be able to gather this year in person, we are excited by the many opportunities that are provided by hosting a “virtual” event. We are hoping this year’s participants will include friends and supporters of Charles River Center who live outside New England and were not able, in the past, to attend the event. We are also encouraging our participants to get creative – to run alone or with family, friends (or even pets!), to dress up (or down) – anything to make it a fun, festive event.

For more information, and to register for either the 5K Run or 1 Mile Walk, please visit: http://www.charlesrivercenterroadrace.com/.
As an organization we have learned a lot about ourselves during the spring and summer of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

We discovered that:

- We are resilient.
- We are courageous.
- We are caring and compassionate.
- We are creative and flexible.
- We are collaborative and cooperative across all departments.
- We are solidly connected to our community supporters.

With the first critical wave of the pandemic behind us, we can say that we fared well, as a result of these attributes. Our staff, families, and the community worked together more than ever before, breaking down barriers and building partnerships.

The gravity of the challenges that we face is immense. Our funding levels remain tenuous as the state wrestles with a looming deficit in fiscal year 2021. Both in-facility and remote services are allowable within limits.

MassHealth, which funds our day habilitation program, limits remote services to three times a week for up to three hours each time and our day programs are limited to 40% capacity to allow for social distancing measures. As we prepare for another critical period in the fall, we continue to build our personal protective equipment inventory and have begun baseline surveillance testing of all residential staff. The state mandates require regular testing when there is a substantial rise in COVID positive cases within our region.

Our day programs have reopened, and remote services are continuing. It is so wonderful to hear from our families that many are thriving with remote services! “The remote services provided by Charles River have allowed our son to maintain social connections with others. Many thanks to the staff for creating many engaging activities.”

– parent of Day Services

Because we firmly believe that we will return to pre-pandemic conditions, we are forging ahead with our strategic plan. We have increased our clinical supports by hiring additional nursing. We hired a Registered Nurse to oversee all the health services at Charles River.

She is joined by a Nurse Practitioner and a new Licensed Practical Nurse. Charles River now employs eight full-time and several per diem Registered Nurses; across all departments we have enhanced our training initiatives by hiring a Training Coordinator who will oversee all training and create succession planning training series for all levels of management. We have broken ground on two community residences in the southeast region to support ten men and women with acquired brain injury. The first is expected to open at the end of the year and the second, early spring.

Despite this being one of the most difficult times that we have ever faced at the Charles River Center, we were able to overcome the many challenges that were presented to us knowing we had the full support of our community. With your continued support, I am confident that we will pull through this health crisis, stronger than ever.

Respectfully Yours,

Anne Larijani

WELCOME OUR DIRECTOR OF FAMILY AND IN-HOME SUPPORTS

Zohreh King is the newest addition to the Charles River Center leadership Team, joining us as the Director of Family and In-Home Supports, overseeing all aspects of Family Support’s programming, supports and services.

Zohreh comes to us after almost eleven years at North Suffolk Mental Health Association, where she most recently served as the first and only Director of Recovery. In that role, she provided supervision to a team of employees and collaborative programmatic support to various mental health and substance use services, including center-based services and community outreach. While at North Suffolk Mental Health Association, she was honored for her exemplary contributions to the agency and served as a featured speaker at a Massachusetts Legislative Breakfast, and at multiple state and national events celebrating mental health recovery.

In welcoming her to the Charles River Center, COO, Joy Reed noted. “We are so fortunate to have Zohreh onboard at CRC. She has embraced her role as the Director of Family and In-home Supports and has already contributed significantly to the agency during this unprecedented health crisis. Despite being a new employee, she jumped in and temporarily oversaw the operations of the COVID Recovery Center. Zohreh has a diverse background of experience which has benefitted those in her division, as well as the Charles River Community.”
THE SPRING THAT WASN'T, THE SUMMER AHEAD

• Residential Rides Out the Pandemic

Our residential programs continue to maintain schedules with enjoyable and interesting activities that are always mindful of safety. These schedules include a combination of remote learning and in-person activities. During the peak of the pandemic, several of our group homes were under quarantine due to COVID-19 positive test results of persons-served. We converted one of our day program spaces into a COVID-19 recovery center, which was extremely helpful in meeting the medical needs of persons-served, as well as decreasing the risk of exposure of COVID-19 to others. Visitation guidelines for persons-served and families have been developed and implemented successfully. Everyone is thrilled to be able to visit and spend time face-to-face with their loved ones again.

Family Support staff delivering free meals to families thanks to Primavera Restaurant in Millis, MA.

• Family and In-Home Supports Connect

With little to no interruption, Family Support and In-Home Supports programs continued to provide services for persons-served and their families. While we limited our home visits and face-to-face contact, staff delivered meals, basic necessities, protective equipment and cleaning supplies, communicated with families through virtual and socially distant measures and navigated to obtain resources and supports. Family Support also offered several virtual parent trainings on guardianship, positive behavior supports and reducing problem behavior. In addition, the program collaborated with Roman Music Therapy to provide a series of group lessons, free of charge.

George created this colorful collage with the help of staff.

Baking is one of the many ways Jenn kept busy while we #stayathome.
PHASED RE-OPENING

Keeping Busy

Our Employment and Day Services program and Day Habilitation program have been closed since mid-March. This closure has been incredibly difficult for persons-served and their families. Initially an outreach team comprised of clinicians, nursing personnel and managers from across day services was developed. Their primary focus was connecting with person-served and families to offer support and resources. In mid-May, their focus shifted to include virtual programming. Day Services was challenged with creating meaningful remote programming and persons-served were challenged with access to technology. A virtual schedule was developed based upon the input and feedback of both persons-served and their families, which includes 30-35 classes per week. The classes are available in a variety of formats, using discussion, visual aids, Power Points and flashcards. Check out the virtual class schedule at https://www.charlesrivercenter.org/1/news/news-events/ In addition Day Services program managers work in collaboration with residential managers to develop schedules of meaningful activities within the homes. The combination of remote learning and in-person activities has been successful.

Growing Season Continues Despite the Pandemic

Even though in-person activities have not occurred since March, the greenhouse and raised beds at the Needham Community Farm continue to produce for the Produce and Flower CSA. In addition, Mike Bolio, horticulture coordinator began weekly virtual programming. The classes include virtual tours of the Needham Community Farm, educational opportunities about new plants, flowers or vegetables, as well as interactive Q & A sessions about home gardens and recipes. Flowers and plants for persons-served to plant have been available for curbside pickup at the Grugan Center.

Mike comes up with interactive ways to keep everyone engaged during the lessons about plants. In addition, he has left plants for everyone to grow and take care of at their home. It helps teach responsibility. We thank him for everything he does!
~ Allyson Chase, sibling of Adam

As the gradual reopening of the program begins, the horticulture program is looking forward to persons-served coming back to the farm.

Day Habilitation: 8/10/2020
Grugan Center: 8/17/2020
Strathmore Road: 8/24/2020

For additional information about our re-opening plans, please visit the re-opening updates page on our website. https://www.charlesriver-center.org/about/reopening-updates/
A Note of Thanks
The tremendous outpouring of support and assistance given by the Charles River community has been incredible. Families and community members continue to show their support with flowers, cards, meals and notes of encouragement via our Thank a Staff Member campaign, as well as sewing homemade fabric masks to help mitigate the shortage of Personal Protection Equipment. In times like this, we’re reminded of how interconnected we all are. Many thanks to our community. Without our community, none of it is possible.

Foundation for Metrowest
Our partners at the Foundation for Metrowest awarded Charles River with the Massachusetts Emergency Relief grant of $5,000. The grant supported our efforts to assist MetroWest families of individuals with disabilities access food and necessities.
In addition, Charles River Center received $10,000 from the MA COVID-19 Relief Fund To support the delivery of support and basic needs for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families through their residential and family support/in-home programs.

FRANK STOCKWELL RETIRES AFTER 35 YEARS WITH CRC
June 30th, 2020 was Frank Stockwell’s last day on the job, marking the end of an era at Charles River Center.
Frank, who had been working as a Production Supervisor at Bose, was hired as the Head Supervisor in the Employment and Training Program on February 28, 1985. Within three months, he transitioned to a marketing role, Director of Contract Sales, a position in which he would remain for the next 35 years. As Director of Contract Sales, Frank’s primary responsibility was to find contract work for persons served in the Employment program. Relying heavily on his own past work experience and connections, Frank proved to be especially skilled at recruiting potential employers and working with them to identify and/or create jobs that could be easily filled by persons-served by the Charles River Center. As a direct result of his efforts, many persons-served were provided with the opportunity for meaningful, paid employment.
When asked to describe the most gratifying part about his position, Frank noted, “Just working with individuals, watching them get their paychecks every couple of weeks, knowing that it was work that I found for them.”
Frank was such an integral part of the Charles River Center community and will be truly missed by all who had the pleasure of working with him. We are so grateful for his many years of service and for all that he did to enrich the lives of our persons served.

IN MEMORIAM
Members of the Charles River Community
John Coffin Joanne Parenteau John “Jack” Walsh
Tributes June 2020-August 2020

Metrowest Health Foundation Grant for $5,000
In April, the Metrowest Health Foundation donated $5,000, to be used to support services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Clayton F. & Ruth L. Hawkridge Foundation
Charles River Center was awarded a $4,000 grant for families that need assistance during COVID-19 pandemic and support virtual activities for persons-served within their homes.

RESIDENTIAL EXPANSION CONTINUES
The Charles River Center moves forward with residential expansion into the Brockton and Easton communities. In collaboration with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Charles River will be creating meaningful community-based services for individuals with acquired brain injury. Scheduled opening of the Brockton program will be January 2021 and the Easton program early spring of 2021.

New residential home located in Brockton, MA
#STAYATHOME

FOLLOW US!

Charles River Center is active on social media, posting photos, current events, information of interest and special updates. Be in the know! Check us out on:

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twitter.com/charlesrivercen

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A leader in supporting people with developmental disabilities