AGENCY RECEIVES HIGH MARKS

In an effort to continue to provide the highest-quality care for those we serve, the Charles River Center regularly undergoes a stringent review and accreditation process from both CARF International and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Having outside groups assess and audit our services ensures that we continue to meet the high standards we strive for and expect.

This fall, Day Habilitation underwent a CARF certification process. CARF International is an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services. According to CARF, “Accreditation is a sign of quality that assures the public that an organization is committed to encouraging feedback, continuously improving services, and serving the community. It also demonstrates an organization’s commitment to enhance performance, manage risk, and distinguish itself from competing organizations.”

Two CARF surveyors spent three days at Charles River, where they interviewed clients, staff and parents, observed group rooms, and reviewed documents and records. The report noted sixteen “areas of strength,” which included: the enthusiasm of the members of the leadership team; the strength and sophistication of the agency’s systems and infrastructure; the agency’s emphasis on health and safety; the attractiveness of the facility; the agency’s presence in the community; and the staff’s responsiveness and respect for individuals. Charles River was given a three-year accreditation, the highest level possible.

“Stakeholders attribute the longevity of the Charles River Center to its attunement to the emergent and changing needs of residents of the populous area in which it has proven to be a responsive and resilient service provider. The leadership and program staff members exhibit the highest level of enthusiasm for fulfilling the organization’s mission and for ensuring that its services are customized to the individuals served, and they provide excellent opportunities for the individuals served to achieve their program goals.” – From the CARF Report

Over the summer, Residential Services and Employment & Day Services were both given two-year licenses by the Department of Developmental Services, following their Office of Quality Enhancement (OQE) Survey & Certification process. All providers who serve individuals funded by DDS (continued on page 3)

A NIGHT TO CELEBRATE: ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER

A record-breaking number of guests enjoyed dinner and a heartwarming program at the elegant Lombardo’s in Randolph on November 10th in celebration of the staff, individuals, and volunteers who have stood out over the past year.

Hearing the success stories of the individuals is always a highlight. For example, Brian S. originally had a hard time leaving the van to attend the summer vacation program but now enters the building with a smile on his face, eager to see what’s on the agenda.

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At the beginning of 2018, I found myself reflecting upon my first year as the President and CEO of the Charles River Center. The year passed very quickly, yet much was accomplished with the incredible support of the Board of Directors, families and community members, and most of all, with the dedication of our staff who work diligently every day to provide quality, individualized programming for those we serve. To highlight a few of the larger initiatives:

- We opened our fourth residence for adults with autism last year.
- We bought a new home in Needham and relocated a residence from Newton.
- We strengthened our infrastructure by enhancing our IT services in accessibility, speed, and security.
- We purchased menu-generating software for the residences to enhance our nutrition practices.
- The Day Habilitation program and the agency received the highest level of accreditation from the international accreditation body, CARF International. Day Habilitation received no recommendations for improvement!

- Residential and Employment & Day Services received the highest level of certification from the Department of Developmental Services. The Employment & Day program received a score of 100% compliance to the standards!
- Our employee appreciation group called the “Fun Committee” conducted numerous staff appreciation initiatives, which included gift baskets, gift cards, raffles, contests, and refreshments as part of our workforce initiative.
- Plans are underway for a total renovation of the exterior of the Grugan Center. Construction will start in the spring.
- Three of the Charles River staff scholarship recipients graduated this year! Congratulations to all!
- We have installed a security system in the Paul Meritt Center, and the Grugan Center and Strathmore Road systems are underway. Feedback from staff and families has been very positive.
- Our Family Support Program grew to the point of needing a new organizational structure. This has allowed staff to become more specialized in the programs offered, while also creating a career path for staff.
- Promotions from within have increased tremendously this year. Record numbers of staff are working towards their degrees or certifications with assistance from our tuition reimbursement program.

As you can see, we have been very busy building new programs for individuals and their families, supporting staff, and improving our infrastructure to sustain our continued growth.

In the upcoming year, Charles River is committed to developing the best possible workforce that we can. We will fully launch Relias Learning, an e-learning platform that allows staff to develop their skills and enhance their knowledge on-line, as well as in-person. Additionally, 20 of our staff will receive an international certification in autism services through IBCCES with support from a grant from Wellesley Bank.

Additionally, we will begin to expand our services for those on the autism spectrum by providing school and home-based consultation and training.

I want to thank all of you for a fantastic beginning! It has been my honor and pleasure to work with an incredible Board of Directors, community partners, family members, and staff at CRC. As legendary NBA coach Phil Jackson once said, “The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” I look forward to more successes with team CRC in the coming years.

Needham Exchange Club Charity Golf Tournament Co-Chairs Peter Dorsey and Ann Walsh present a check for $16,500 to Charles River Center CEO Anne-Marie Bajwa, Board of Directors Chair Alice Taylor, and VP of Development Hilary Ryan. At their meeting, Anne-Marie saluted the Club and the “absolutely extraordinary commitment you’ve made to the Charles River Center. Because of you, we’re able to reach out to more families.” This year’s Tournament proceeds will, among other things, fund scholarships for families who might not otherwise be able to access services such as recreational programs and respite weekends for caregivers.
AGENCY RECEIVES HIGH MARKS

(continued from page 1)

are required to meet state licensing and certification regulations that assure health, safety, human rights, and quality services for the people they serve.

In Residential, surveyors said the homes were “well-maintained and reflective of [the clients’] personal preferences and tastes.” The report complimented the agency on its promotion of good nutritional practices by providing ample healthy meal choices, fresh fruits and vegetables, and further stated, “The agency also promoted healthy lifestyles by assisting individuals to be physically active including walking, swimming, and playing basketball.”

We are extremely proud that Employment & Day Services received a score of 100% compliance to the standards! Surveyors commented that “individuals interviewed were pleased with the opportunities presented to them and a review of interest inventories, assessments and general information revealed that people were supported to participate in activities based on their preferences,” with the Horticulture Program standing out as a particular favorite. The report also stated that the “agency has shown that it seeks out and develops jobs that are uniquely geared toward the individuals seeking employment at integrated competitive work sites,” and that “case managers/job coaches remained aware of people’s need for continued support to remain employed and routinely checked-in with employers to ensure that their needs were being met.”

At the Charles River Center, we strive to remain true to our mission – to provide the highest-quality supports and services to those we serve – so it is reassuring and rewarding that these two organizations validated that promise.

A NIGHT TO CELEBRATE

(continued from page 1)

for the day. Richard Lawrence gave a moving speech about Michael H.’s contagious positive spirit. Michael once successfully initiated “the wave” at a Red Sox game at his beloved Fenway Park. Danielle L. was commended for being a promoter of human rights during Members Advisory Council meetings, and Bellanda N. was recognized for her positive attitude and hard work at Stokes, and the Needham and Wellesley golf clubs.

Earning the Earle Mountain staff recognition award was Jennifer Fagan, Vice President of Residential Services. Anne-Marie Bajwa complimented Jenn on her natural leadership qualities and “can do attitude,” noting that “she inspires loyalty” and “is the person in the room who always asks, ‘What’s best for the individual?’”

The Community Service Award was given to Marc Mandel, Executive Director of The Needham Channel. Marc has done a terrific job mentoring Jeff A., an individual who has an internship at The Needham Channel and a great interest in video editing.

This annual event is a wonderful reminder of the kindness and capability of Charles River personnel, the support we receive from the community, and the remarkable achievements the individuals are making every day. Visit the Charles River Center’s Facebook page to see more photos from the event.
CRC REACHES OUT TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FAMILIES

In an effort to find and help some of the most vulnerable families who have a child with special needs – families who might not know about the resources available to them – Nicole and Paige, two Program Coordinators in Family Support at the Charles River Center, are visiting Barbieri Elementary School in Framingham on Fridays. The idea for this innovative program came about a few years ago when a school social worker reached out to the Charles River Center asking for help for one specific family. Both school and CRC representatives soon realized there were many families who could use assistance navigating the system, so a partnership was formed.

Barbieri Elementary is a K-5 school with an enrollment of 688 children. Seventy percent are Hispanic with 40% English Language Learners, and 41% of the school population is economically disadvantaged. Twenty percent of the students at Barbieri have disabilities, with 65% classified as “high-need” – as opposed to 43% across the state.

Many families, some of whom are new to the country, are not aware that they can get financial support from the Department of Developmental Services for expenses such as speech and physical therapies, specialized equipment, respite, and assistive technology. These therapies and tools can be extremely beneficial to the development of their child, but are often prohibitively expensive.

Working closely with school social workers, who refer specific families, Paige and Nicole (who speaks Spanish) explain the benefits available to them and help them fill out the paperwork for DDS eligibility. In the process, families also learn what services the Charles River Center can provide to them, such as weekend and recreational programs, educational seminars, respite, assistance with stipends, and much more. Open Houses have also been offered during the evening to better reach parents who aren’t available during the day.

Much of the work is trust-building. Ellen Kilicarslan, Vice President of Family Support, thinks it’s important for the families and the staff of Barbieri to become more familiar with Charles River Center personnel. “We have been very pleased with the collaboration, as it enables the Charles River Center staff to reach those families who would have not otherwise been able to access our agency’s programs and services,” said Kilicarslan. “We are moving in a direction that will allow us to have a presence throughout the district and perhaps engage in program development to create afterschool and other services outside of the school day for Framingham students.”

The program has been so successful, this spring there will be an open house at Cameron Middle School, and there are plans for Charles River personnel to visit Framingham High School on a regular basis as well. This is an important goal, because the high school years are a critical time for families, as they determine next steps for their child as he or she leaves the school system and transitions to adult services. The Charles River Center wants families to know and understand that we are there for them every step of the way.

The Dedham Institution for Savings Foundation has donated $7,000 to the Charles River Center to help fund the training of employees in American Sign Language (ASL) and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

PECS is a system where a non-verbal person shows another person a picture of a desired item in exchange for that item. The system can become quite complex, with non-verbal individuals putting pictures together to form sentences, use modifiers, answer questions, and make comments. With the implementation of these trainings, the Charles River Center expects to see improved communication between staff and clients and increased independence for the clients. Approximately 40 staff members across all divisions will benefit from these trainings.

Pictured from left to right are Cara Iadonisi, Dedham Savings, Branch Supervisor – Needham Office; Anne-Marie Bajwa, Charles River Center, President & CEO; and Mark Ingalls, Dedham Institution for Savings Foundation, Trustee.
HORTICULTURE PROGRAM KEEPS BUSY EVEN DURING WINTER

The cold weather hasn’t stopped the Horticulture Program from working and volunteering in the community. Over 60 individuals continue to participate in this vibrant program in some manner during the week. Here’s what they’ve been up to:

- Over the fall, groups of five individuals picked apples at Hutchins Farm in Concord. This was the Horticulture Program’s first paid, group employment site, which pleased the pickers!
- At Belmont Habitat, a small group brushes and feeds the goats on a weekly basis.
- An exciting new project is set for spring at Drumlin Farm in Lincoln. Individuals will track data in vernal pools as part of an eco-monitoring program. This is in addition to caring for the chickens in the coops.
- Back at CRC, groups have smoked peppers, made teas from dried herbs that were grown this summer, and created beautiful wreaths with greenery, berries, and pinecones found on forest hikes.
- A large group helped to rake leaves and clean up the Rose Kennedy Greenway in November.

PHIL ROBNEY TO BE HONORED AT GALA APRIL 27TH

Save the date! We hope you can join us at the Charles River Center’s annual Building a Dream Gala at 6:00 pm on Friday, April 27th at the Boston Marriott Newton (new location!).

This year, we are excited to honor Phil Robey for his many years of service to the Charles River Center. Phil has been a member of the Charles River Center Board of Directors since 1994 and served as Chairman twice. In addition to his longstanding commitment to Charles River, his contributions include 18 years as elected commissioner of Needham Park and Recreation, 30 years coaching Needham Little League (with six of those as President), 32 concurrent years with the Needham Exchange Club, and 25 years as a Town Meeting Member.

A proud member of the Providence College Alumni Association, Phil has received numerous community awards, including The George A. Dennett Distinguished Career Award from Needham High School. He was recently instrumental in the establishment of the Fallen Brave monument at Memorial Park. A lifelong resident of Needham, Phil is the embodiment of community spirit.

It’s an inspiring evening with cocktails, silent and live auctions, dinner and program. Proceeds benefit the 950 people with developmental disabilities supported by the Charles River Center. Tickets are $175 each. To purchase tickets or a sponsorship, or for more information, visit www.charlesrivercenter.org or contact Hilary Ryan, Vice President of Development, at hryan@charlesrivercenter.org or (781) 972-1030.
FUNd-A-NEED UPdATe: Thanks for the Health & Wellness Equipment

At our Building a Dream Gala last May, 89 generous supporters blew away our $25,000 goal and donated a record $39,050 to the Charles River Center’s Health & Wellness Initiative. This was a terrific way to launch a focus on well-being at the Charles River Center.

Our nurse, Jennifer Abate, R.N., says “This new equipment allows the individuals to learn healthy habits and experience new things, plus, they’re expending energy and having fun in the process.” Heidi Chunji, Program Director at our Rosemary Street home adds, “The guys at Rosemary Street like to stay active! The addition of the new treadmill lets them work out together – which makes it much more enjoyable for them to exercise.”

Stay tuned for more information about the Health and Wellness Initiative.

EDUCATION, EMPOWERMENT, PREVENTION: PROTECTING THOSE WE SERVE

Recent news articles have brought attention to the subject of sexual assault on those with developmental disabilities. At Charles River, we use a multifaceted approach to attempt to prevent instances of assault, using a combination of education, empowerment, and prevention for those we serve, as well as for staff members.

All individuals in Employment & Day Services regularly take classes that incorporate the Circles® curriculum. This program, specifically developed to teach people with developmental disabilities about social boundaries, intimacy and relationships, was found in many studies to be effective in the protection against abuse and exploitation.

Agency-wide, Positive Behavior Supports are incorporated in everyday interactions and written expectations are posted in residences and program rooms. Topics routinely discussed and modeled are “proximity,” which encourages personal space and boundaries and “communication,” which encourages individuals to communicate with staff about issues they are facing, including human rights.

Across all divisions, human rights are taught to individuals using a multimodal approach, and materials continue to be modified to enhance the participants’ understanding of the concepts. Individuals are encouraged to stand up for their rights. All programs and residences have identified Human Rights Officers, who have been specially trained by the state to serve in that role. In the Day Habilitation Program, a Members Advisory Council of individuals meets monthly to discuss and roleplay human rights. Human rights trainings are also part of the curriculum in Employment & Day services, where topics have included: recognizing abuse, saying no, my body my choice, privacy, personal relationship training, and appropriate boundaries.

Last month, Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong presented an Awareness & Action Training (led by people with developmental disabilities) to educate individuals about recognizing, reporting, and responding to abuse.

For staff training, all staff are required to take an annual course on Human Rights & Mandated Reporting. Employees are required, by law, to report any “suspected occurrences of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment of individuals with developmental disabilities” to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC). Additionally, the agency maintains a proper a staff to client ratio in our homes and programs. Staff are also trained to recognize changes in a person’s behavior or demeanor that may be indicative of distress for that individual. Behaviorists are on staff to assist in behavioral assessments to determine possible reasons for a sudden change in behavior. Additionally, Charles River has a robust whistleblower policy in place to encourage staff to alert management to suspected improprieties.

As an agency, we hold the health and safety of our individuals as our highest priority. We educate and encourage those we serve, as well as staff, to be forthcoming and honest about their experiences and feelings, and we aim to keep open lines of communication. We are hopeful that our approach, as well as the utilized tools and trainings, will empower people to speak up, and will keep those we serve safe from harm. If you have any questions or comments, please let us know.

FUND-A-NEED UPDATE:

With these funds, we were able to purchase:

• treadmills
• stationery bicycles
• yoga mats
• weights
• fitness balls
• recumbent bicycles
• cooking equipment
Welcome New COO
Pranita Amarasinghe

Pranita Amarasinghe joined CRC this fall as Chief Operating Officer, reporting to Anne-Marie Bajwa, President and CEO.

“We are thrilled to have Pranita join our team. She brings a wealth of leadership experiences to the job both on the fiscal and programmatic sides and tremendous passion for our mission,” said Anne-Marie.

Pranita oversees the organization’s four program divisions, ensuring accountability for high-quality services and support for program staff. She manages activities related to budgeting, compliance and accreditation, and workforce planning, and ensures the agency has the infrastructure to grow effectively – helping to drive mission-aligned program expansion when appropriate opportunities arise.

Prior to joining the Charles River Center, Pranita was Chief Financial Officer and COO at Boston Senior Home Care and Central Boston Elder Services (CBES), and before that, Director of Administration & Policy/Chief Accountant at the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA). Her major accomplishments included the development of housing in Dudley Square while at CBES and the creation of new programs to move tenants out of public housing while at CHA.

She assisted these organizations in achieving sustainable growth levels, helped them strategically diversify to new service areas, and acted as a key player during the budgeting, forecasting, and planning processes. In the 1990s, Pranita helped bring the internet to Sri Lanka by assisting in the launch of the first internet service provider on the island.

“Growing up on the island nation of Sri Lanka, I saw how people struggle for survival. My family always helped people in whatever way they could. To this day, those values are instilled in me and will be the hallmark for my work at the Charles River Center. I look forward to making a difference in the lives of Charles River Center clients,” said Pranita.

Pranita earned both a B.S. in Business Administration and an MBA from Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, California. She is a Certified Public Accountant, licensed in California, and member of the Massachusetts Society of CPAs.

Joseph Breitfelder and Cynthia Chaston Join the Board

We are pleased to welcome Joseph Breitfelder and Cynthia Chaston to the Charles River Center’s Board of Directors.

Joseph, a resident of Wellesley, is a retired partner with the investment firm NEPC, LLP, which specializes in employee benefit plans and charitable foundations. A Certified Public Accountant, Breitfelder is a graduate of Toledo University and received his Masters of Business degree from Suffolk University.

Cynthia, a Certified Public Accountant, is currently Corporate Controller at Chaston Associates, a loan review company in North Andover. A 32-year resident of Needham, she is a commissioner of the Needham Park and Recreation Commission, a Town Meeting Member, and an active member of the Needham Exchange Club, where she served as President in 2013.

They join Alice Taylor (Chair), Rick Zimbone (Vice Chair), Gilbert Cox, Jr. (Treasurer), William Day (Secretary), Clare Dunsford, Jill Fadule, Nicole Gowe, Leslie Lockhart, Gerry McTernan, Phil Robey, and John Timmerman.

We are thankful to all of them for committing their time and energy to serving on the Board!
CELEBRATING TWO RETIREMENTS

Babson College held a retirement party for Leslie C. on December 14th. Leslie had been working in the laundry room for a remarkable 29 ½ years! A huge crowd gathered to wish her well with many speeches and gifts.

On January 31st, the Charles River YMCA in Needham held a lovely goodbye party for Bill L., who has worked there as a Day Porter for 15 years. Bill will enjoy his retirement at CRC in the Community Choices group and plans to work with the Horticulture Program twice a week. Everyone at the Y will surely miss his unforgettable smile!

Angela Edgeston, Leslie C., Heather Lomartire

Bill L., seated, surrounded by well-wishers

Leslie C. with her Babson co-workers