Expanding Mental Health Supports in Greater Danbury

According to the Center for Disease Control, at any given time, approximately one in four adults is living with a mental illness. For many of these individuals, managing daily life can be difficult and they may require additional supports to maintain their health and achieve success with employment and personal relationships. Ability Beyond Disability is committed to supporting people with mental health challenges; helping them to live full and rewarding lives in the community.

On July 1st, Ability Beyond Disability experienced a first in its history – a successful merger with another organization, Interlude, Inc. The merger helped Ability Beyond Disability to further expand its mental health services and benefit from the expertise of staff and positive reputation Interlude had built over its 30 year history.

Following the merger with Interlude, we continued to expand our mental health services by opening a new Young Adult Residential Program in Danbury. Ability Beyond Disability is the first organization in the greater Danbury area to provide residential mental health services that are structured specifically for young adults. We have a proven track record of success with similar programs in the Bristol area of Connecticut where we currently support 25 individuals.

“Due to our success in the Bristol area we are known by our funders as being the ‘Cadillac of services,’” said Heidi Chelednik, Services Director at Ability Beyond Disability. “They send us their most challenging cases as we are able to provide the highest quality of care.”

Through the development of this new program, three condos in Danbury have become a home for six young men and women between the ages of 18-25, who have experienced severe trauma or have mental illness. Ability Beyond Disability is providing comprehensive supports, including clinical and behavioral modification, social skills development, community integration, life skills instruction, medical care and education/vocational supports within these homes.

William is 20 years old and has been living in the program for 2 months. He came to us from the Department of Children and Families and though it was a difficult transition for him at first, he is happy to be at Ability Beyond Disability and is motivated to move forward and achieve independence.

“I want to be on my own,” he said. “I have things I need to work on though, like saving money and finding a place to live.”

William recently got a job at Stop & Shop; a step in the right direction.

“You’ve gotta work for what you get,” said William. “I’ve been through things most people can’t even believe…but there is a way out. When someone opens the door for you, you need to take that opportunity.”

Ability Beyond Disability also supports approximately 100 individuals in the Danbury area with mental illness through its employment services. Employment Specialists, who work with individuals to develop job skills and obtain employment, are embedded with various external agencies and clinical teams including the Western Connecticut Mental Health Network of Danbury, the Mental Health Association of Connecticut, New Milford Hospital, and Catholic Charities.

At Ability Beyond Disability, we are committed to helping people achieve their goals, regardless of the challenges they face. As individuals with mental illness continue to require help, we will continue to grow our services so that we can support even more people who need us.
Students Give Back

Young philanthropists have been making their way to Ability Beyond Disability over the past few months and learning what it really means to give back to the community.

Wooster Students at Ability Beyond Disability

In August, 5 Seniors from the Wooster School in Danbury, CT spent a morning volunteering with a group of young adults served by our Day Program. The two groups met at a local church and spent some time getting to know each other. Then they worked side-by-side tie-dying T-shirts that have served as a momento from the day. Everyone had a great time and are excited for the next time they can all get together.

“I really enjoyed and appreciated the time I spent with Ability Beyond Disability, not because I knew I was doing something good or because it was self-gratifying, but because I genuinely enjoyed spending time with and developing friendships with other people close to my age,” said Hannah Grassie, one of the student volunteers. “Spending time with my partner that day further increased my awareness that although someone may face certain challenges, that doesn’t mean they are any lesser of a person, that they’re still really funny and intelligent and empathetic, and possess all of the qualities anyone else could,” she said.

Brunswick Students at Roses for Autism Program

In September, 95 Sophomore boys from the Brunswick School in Greenwich, CT spent a day working at our Roses for Autism program in Guilford. The group worked hard; they were cleaning old buckets to be reused, placing bamboo strips in the rose garden to aid in growing, tending to the Gerbera Daisies and more. There to lend a helping hand was Connecticut State Senator Scott Frantz, who worked alongside the young men.

Derek Hruska, Sophomore Dean of the school said, “Too often, community service is not taken advantage of as fully as it should. I don’t think there is any doubt that the boys left Roses tired and fulfilled! There was plenty for us to do and the Roses staff were wonderfully friendly and professional in guiding and laughing with our group.”

If you know an individual or group who would like to volunteer with us, please contact Samantha Cosentino at 203.826.3181
Helping Companies Make Great Business Decisions

- Did you know that hiring individuals with disabilities allows you to tap into a new market, as the disability community spends an excess of $700 billion annually?

- Did you know that people with disabilities are more likely to stay with an employer than employees without disabilities - reducing turnover rates and saving money?

- Did you know that absentee rates are lower for employees with disabilities compared to those without disabilities, according to a 2008 corporate practices study completed by Rutgers University? Better attendance records and longer tenures directly correlate to increased productivity and revenue.

This past year we created a corporate consultation service to serve as a resource to businesses in employing people with disabilities. We recognized that there is a need for this type of support in the business world and that we have the expertise to fill that need! There is new, proposed federal legislation that would require certain companies to hire people with disabilities as a percentage of their entire workforce. At the same time, Ability Beyond Disability is often approached by companies who are looking for a way to diversify their workforce and integrate people with disabilities on a large scale.

In order to address these challenges, Ability Beyond Disability has created a corporate consultation service. We have partnered with experts from around the country to assist us on this endeavor, which is a win-win for both corporations and people with disabilities.

We are excited to move forward and help companies open their eyes to the world of possibilities that can come from hiring people with disabilities. Expect to hear more about it soon!

Thank you to the following funders for their support through recent grant awards:

$25,000 - The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation, Inc. - for General Operating Funds
$11,300 - The Fairfield Community Foundation - for Day Programs and Assistive Technology
$10,000 - The P&G Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation - for Young Adult Programs
$5,000 - The TJX Foundation, Inc. - for Supportive Independent Living
$5,000 - Barden Foundation - for General Operating Funds
$5,000 - People’s United Community Foundation - for Supportive Independent Living
$4,000 - Town of Bethel - for Programs in Bethel, CT
$1,000 - Gen Re - A Berkshire Hathaway Company - for Assistive Technology
$874 - Comcast Foundation - for General Operating Funds
Corporate Recognition Breakfast

On October 4th, Ability Beyond Disability held its inaugural Corporate Recognition Breakfast at the Matrix in Danbury, CT. We had over 250 attendees and for the first time were able to both recognize the individuals we serve and thank the business community for their continued support of Ability Beyond Disability in one place, at one time.

Businesses were nominated based on their commitment to helping people with disabilities achieve their goals. Employees were nominated based on their commitment to being great assets to the companies where they work. The winners included PepsiCo for the Business Leadership Award; AON as Corporate Volunteer of the Year; Siobhan O’Shea of Towers Watson as Distinguished Partner of the Year; Millennium Dental as Employer of the Year; Joe Massamilo as Employee of the Year and Lisa Maroto for the Longevity Award.

The keynote speaker for the event was Chester Elton, world renowned author, motivational speaker, trainer, and employee engagement expert. He spoke about the importance of corporations giving back to the community and recognizing the potential that individuals with disabilities have in the workplace.

Underwriters of the event included Topex, Cartus, Red Oak Transportation and American Express. Thank you to our underwriters, volunteers, our Corporate Committee, and Chester Elton for making this event a success!

New Office Open in Norwalk, CT

On July 24th, we celebrated the official grand opening of our Norwalk satellite office with an Open House Ceremony. Staff, individuals served by Ability Beyond Disability, community members, corporate supporters, council members and state legislators attended and joined us in celebrating our new Park Street location in the Human Services Council Building.

Ability Beyond Disability was welcomed by Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, Senator Robert Duff and Representative Lawrence Cafero at our Open House Ceremony.

For several years, the Employment Services team in Norwalk has been working remotely so they now have a place to call “home!” This new office space is also making a new day program possible that serves 20 individuals.

This past year, we have helped over 300 individuals in the Lower Fairfield County in their quest for employment. Individuals we serve are employed at businesses such as Stew Leonard’s of Norwalk, Walgreens of Norwalk and Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

“We are excited about our continued growth in lower Fairfield county, and the opportunity to provide services to those who need us in the Norwalk community” says Tom Fanning, President/CEO.
2012 Celebration of Ability

This year’s annual meeting was held at Boehringer Ingelheim in Ridgefield, CT and over 125 community members came out in support of Ability Beyond Disability including: Board members, family members, donors, volunteers, employees and people who were simply looking to learn more about who we are and what we do.

Committee members from the Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees gave reports on their activities from the past fiscal year. Members of our reconfiguration team, a project team including internal staff and external experts, gave an impactful presentation to the audience about the plans to renovate our homes so that they better meet the needs of the people we serve.

We also recognized our Legacy members who have committed to leaving gifts to Ability Beyond Disability in their estate plans. Planned gifts help to secure the future for people served by Ability Beyond Disability, helping to fill the financial gap in a time when government support continues to decrease.

To view the brief video we showed that highlighted our success over the past fiscal year visit our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/abeyonddisability.

Thank you to Boehringer Ingelheim for generously donating the space, food and beverages for the event, for the third year in a row!

2012 Golf Challenge a Success!

On August 13th we held the annual Ability Beyond Disability, Mercedes-Benz Championships for the third year in a row at the Ridgewood Country Club in Danbury, CT. Over 100 golfers came together to raise over $117,000!

Some of our sponsors included Maplewood Senior Living, Fairfield County Bank, Raymond James Financial Services Inc., AON, The Beylouni Family, Hawley Management Company and Presidio.

The winning twosome, from Fairfield County Bank, included Dave Schneider and Peter Hayes who qualified to compete in a two-round Sectional Tournament to be held at the Turtle Bay Resort in Oahu, Hawaii. They also have the chance to continue on in the Mercedes-Benz Dealer Championships Final at the Masters in August, GA.

Special thanks to Bob Camastro for his generosity in hosting another incredible event! Thanks also to our golfers, sponsors and volunteers!

Family Giving

In 1953, a small group of families gathered to discuss ways they could help their children have a brighter, more secure future. The result was the founding of Ability Beyond Disability.

We have not forgotten that families are at the core of our organization; that is why we created the Family Giving Circle program. We are asking all of our family members to reach out to their family and friends for the purpose of forming a circle that will raise money to support programs and services.

This program is so unique because it encourages sustainable giving through monthly, quarterly and annual commitments. Sustainable giving is essential to the success of nonprofit organizations like ours.

To learn more about how you can raise funds for your loved one through the Family Giving Circle program, please contact Alice Meenan at 203.826.3182 or Alice.Meenan@abilitybeyonddisability.org.

Planned Giving

Charitable giving is not just about outright gifts. There are other giving options available that can allow you to support Ability Beyond Disability well into the future.

These options are known as planned gifts, and they can include a wide variety of gift assets from cash and marketable securities to a family home or other real estate to closely held business assets, mineral rights, and intellectual property.

Whether you are concerned about lifetime income, the continued beneficial use of a property, or providing for family members, a planned gift may be the solution you need.

To learn more or to set up your planned gift and become a member of our Legacy Society please contact Alice Meenan at 203.826.3182 or Alice.Meenan@abilitybeyonddisability.org.
Ability Beyond Disability is Evolving

On August 1st, Ability Beyond Disability officially went live with a new electronic consumer record system called “Evolv”. This new system is making the organization more efficient and is increasing the quality of care that is provided.

Evolv has taken the place of what seemed like a constant, insurmountable amount of paperwork for the employees of Ability Beyond Disability. Between the regulations required by the states and federal governments, the billing process for services and the documentation required to ensure that the people that are in Ability Beyond Disability’s care are getting the best supports possible, staff were spending countless hours each day on paperwork alone. This was costing the organization both money and time.

A powerful tool, Evolv has allowed Ability Beyond Disability to become more efficient and deliver better care by automating many recurring administrative tasks, greatly reducing data entry and paperwork, enabling more efficient reporting, increasing information accuracy resulting in fewer errors and eliminating file storage expenses due to less paper use. Employees are now using Evolv on their laptops, iPads and iPhones rather than carrying around file folders filled with paperwork.

For the people served by Ability Beyond Disability, this new system means that the staff has more time to focus on providing direct care. It also means that each individual now has a better, more comprehensive and more meaningful record that includes medical, program and clinical information. These records are accessible from anywhere - including family homes and doctors offices - which means that everyone involved in someone’s care is getting a comprehensive, accurate snapshot of their health and well-being in real time.

The new system comes after months of planning by employees across the organization. Over 1,000 staff members have been trained on the system to date and it is being used in all of our program areas. Getting Evolv up and running required a lot of resources, but in the end, will save money and time, and means that we are providing the best care possible for the individuals served by Ability Beyond Disability.

Family Outreach Committee Hosts First Family Picnic

On September 22nd, the Family Outreach Committee held their first Family Outreach Picnic at Lewisboro Park in South Salem, NY. Over 100 people from both CT and NY came out to enjoy the day with friends and family. There was on site barbecuing, face painting, dancing, volleyball and many activities that everyone enjoyed. One of our employees from Mt. Kisco even volunteered to be the “DJ” for the day! For a long time, families have expressed their desire for an event like this where they would have the opportunity to build relationships with other families across the entire organization.

This was a first for Ability Beyond Disability and the idea came out of the Family Outreach Committee of the Board of Trustees – many of whom are Board members and also family members. The Committee plans to make this an annual event. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time to make the event so successful!
Doing More With Less

On September 28th, Ability Beyond Disability co-hosted the “Doing More with Less” conference in conjunction with the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD).

The conference brought together people in the field of developmental disabilities to talk about the challenges that face providers of an aging population and the potential solutions to these problems.

Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Commissioner Terrence W. Macy spoke at the event at our Bethel headquarters. Over 45 people were in attendance including providers, family members and experts in the field. Attendees traveled from Massachusetts, New York and even as far as North Carolina!

Addressing a Changing Landscape

Over the past few years, the leadership of Ability Beyond Disability has recognized the changing environment in which health and human services exists. This change is not happening gradually, it is rapid, with both immediate and long term repercussions. A key factor in this change is the dramatically different demographic makeup of our population, specifically, the impact of the Baby Boomer generation.

Throughout U.S. history, there has always been a large population of healthy, young individuals who were able to support a smaller population of vulnerable individuals who rely on public assistance. That relationship is shifting and soon the number of individuals who need assistance will be equal to the number of individuals who can support them.

The bottom line is that there will be fewer resources available for meeting increased needs. For Ability Beyond Disability, these increased needs evidenced in these facts: one in 88 children born today is on the autism spectrum; returning veterans are increasingly suffering from traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress syndrome; people with developmental disabilities are simply living longer. Society has no plan to address this phenomena, and community non-profit organizations like Ability Beyond Disability must play a lead role in demonstrating what is possible. We have an obligation to face our challenges head on and come up with solutions.

One way we have done this at Ability Beyond Disability is through what we call our “Reconfiguration Project” A group of internal and external experts have came together to create a plan that will allow us to continue to serve people with disabilities, despite shrinking resources. Through this plan we will renovate or replace many of our existing group homes so that the people we serve will be able to live there throughout their entire lives; even as they age, face mobility challenges and require more support. The plan comes after years of researching best practice designs, efficient building materials and technology that promotes independence and maintains safety.

In order to make this plan a reality, we will rely on the support of the community, as the government will not provide the funds we need. Ability Beyond Disability is ready to address the needs of the people we serve now and will serve in the future - and we need your help to see it all the way through.

For more information about how to help, please contact Kim Bragoli, Director of Development and Communications at 203.826.3185.

We’re trying to email you!

As part of our efforts to keep you informed and engaged about the work we’re doing at Ability Beyond Disability, we’d like to send you information via email. If you’d like to begin receiving emails from us, or if you’ve recently changed your email address, please let us know! Send your full name and email address to press@abilitybeyonddisability.org and expect to be hearing from us soon!
Dear Friends,

People with disabilities are an important part of the fabric of our communities. One way or another, most all of us are influenced in our daily lives by a person with a disability, whether it’s a family member, a friend, a neighbor or a co-worker. Some of these disabilities are obvious, others are virtually invisible but as we come to know more people with disabilities, the stereotypes begin to fall away and we start to see the person as he or she actually is, rather than what we might have presumed.

On a societal level, there are potentially complimentary phenomena in play. On the one hand, projections are that there will be a tremendous shortage of workers available in the US in coming years. On the other, there are 56 million people living with disabilities in our country and only 30% of them are actually employed. We have an opportunity for a real “win - win” here!

Hiring people with disabilities is not just good for the community, it is good business! Recruitment and employment of individuals with disabilities can have a positive impact on the bottom line of any company. Statistics have shown greater retention rates, lower absenteeism and an increase in both staff and customer loyalty.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and I’d like to take a moment to thank the members of the business community who have partnered with us to provide employment opportunities to people with disabilities. The workplace is one of the last frontiers for people with disabilities: Employment provides personal identity, pride and a paycheck! We look forward now to working with even more companies as we cross the next frontier, connecting willing and capable workers with job and career opportunities throughout Connecticut and New York. Together, we can be a catalyst for a more inclusive workforce.

Warm Regards,

Tom