



# You don't have to tell us there's a workforce crisis!

## Workforce Crisis Virtual Summit

### A Call to Confront Serious Workforce Crisis

New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) held a summit that represented a Call to Action to confront the serious workforce crisis the sector is, and has been, facing. As Tom McAlvanah, President of NYDA stated, "there's not enough manpower to carry out the mission, families can't hold on to staff they trust, self-advocates are exhausted." It's not just a statewide problem, it's a nationwide issue. Over 500 people attended the virtual Summit.

Recent data demonstrates that the crisis is at emergency levels with 118 agencies reporting, the average statewide vacancy rate is 24.71% with DOH rate region breakouts as follows:

- Region 1 at 18.29%
- Region 2 at 27.33%
- Region 3 at 25.77%
- Region 4 at 27.45%

The change in statewide staff vacancy rate from January 1 – July 1, 2020 to January 1, 2021- April 1, 2021 is 74.3%. Agencies reported that they had to close programs or reduce operations due to staffing shortages at a rate of 47.9%.

93.16% of agencies reported a decrease in job applicants.

State Senator John Mannion, Chair of the Disabilities Committee, participated in the Summit and stated that in his first five months as a State Senator, he learned that agencies have the inability to recruit and retain staff. He further offered that the paradigm needs to change as staff need better pay, more training and a career ladder to create pathways. Senator Mannion is committed to standing the direct support professional career alone from every other to make sure it's valued.

Michael Seereiter, President & CEO of the NY Alliance, Ann Hardiman, Chief Innovation Officer for the NY Alliance, Cathy Varano, Chief Program Officer and Kirsten Sanchirico, VP for Workforce Advancement for NY Alliance also participated in the Summit. Michael offered that the pandemic has exacerbated the workforce crisis along with a societal devaluation of certain positions in the human services sector. He further offered that New York's receipt of enhanced federal Medicaid funds must be used to increase staff salaries, but that longer term solutions need to be identified, too.

Ann Hardiman, a long-standing champion of the direct support profession and workforce, highlighted the multiplier effect



#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Workforce Crisis.....1-2
- Our Everyday Heroes—
  - Kerry Brush .....2
  - Retirees.....2
  - Tobi Plude, Holly Lord.....3
  - Garrett Evans' story.....4
  - Foothold AWARDS Impact Winner.....4
  - Honoring Dedicated Staff.....6
  - Busy programs and services/Photo montage.....6-7
  - Fundraising Efforts & Wish List.....8
  - Recruitment Efforts & How to Help.....9

Cont. p.2

## WORKFORCE CRISIS, CONT.

between not-for-profit providers as economic engines in their respective communities and the fact that direct support professionals spend their hard-earned wages at local businesses. She also offered that increased wages mean staff won't need to work so much overtime at their agencies and it will save money that can be reinvested

back into the sector. There's an incredible return on investment when people stay in their job.

NY Alliance Board Members also participated in the Summit including Kirk Lewis, Mindy Cervoni, Ellen Gutmaker and Dan Brown. To view the NYDA Workforce Summit, go to: [NYDA Workforce Crisis Summit - YouTube](#)

*CWI is very involved in these actions and all the initiatives of the Alliance as our CEO, Mark Donahue, serves as Chairperson of the Alliance Board of Directors.*

### *Our Everyday Heroes*

*In this issue, we want to focus on some of our staff members. They are role models who represent dozens and dozens of other team members in their passion and dedication to service of people who rely upon them.*



Kerry Brush was recognized in the Post Star's Top Nurses' segment in May 2021. Kerry Brush is a Registered Nurse, working as a Health Services Specialist here at CWI. After graduating high school, Kerry went to SUNY Albany to pursue a Bachelor's degree in psychology. She withdrew from the program due to a family emergency and started working as a direct care staff with developmentally disabled adults for the YAI, National Institute for People with Disabilities out of Westchester, New York. She was soon promoted to management. "Being in direct care exposed me to the medical world, and I learned I was rather good at it. I had a natural instinct for caring for people," she said. "I worked in management for 9 years, and the further up the management chain I moved, the more I realized it was not what I wanted to do. I missed doing direct care. That was where my true passion was."

In 2012, Kerry's grandfather was diagnosed with dementia. Her grandmother was struggling to care for him alone. They lived in Queensbury right down

the street from SUNY Adirondack. "My mom made me an offer," said Kerry.

"She said if I moved in with them and assisted with their care, I could attend nursing school at SUNY Adirondack. So I did." Kerry graduated in the fall of 2016 from SUNY Adirondack as a Registered Nurse. "I was not sure exactly what area of nursing I wanted to get into," she said. "Then at the graduation breakfast, an alumni nurse came to speak. She talked about working for CWI. I've always been very passionate about working with intellectually and developmentally disabled population. I spoke to her about CWI and applied shortly thereafter. I have been working here ever since."

"One of my favorite things about nursing is that you are constantly learning and growing," said Kerry.

"Medicine is always changing, and we need to change with it."

Kerry lives in Queensbury. She has a sister who lives locally, with the rest of her family being spread out between New York City, Westchester and Vermont. "I am the oldest of 6 siblings--4 sisters and 2 brothers. And we are freakishly close," she said.

Kerry said she loves teaching and is able to do a lot of training with the direct care staff to ensure they are equipped to care for the individuals in their care.

### *Honoring Our Dedicated Staff*

Since the last printing of our newsletter, *Tina Keech* and *Cindy Johnson* have joined the Retiree Club! Tina spent 4 years with CWI as a Bus Driver and Cindy held various jobs in her 39 years, including QIDP and Associate Day Services Manager!!! Congratulations to you both.

***--over 60% of CWI staff are fully vaccinated against COVID-19***

## Our Everyday Heroes, Cont.

Toby Plude and Holly Lord have been nominated by their supervisors for the Justice Center's Code of Conduct Awards. The honor is given to four individuals who embody the ethical standards outlined in the Code of Conduct for Custodians of People with Special Needs. The Code provides a framework intended to assist staff to help people with special needs "live self-directed meaningful lives in their communities, free from abuse and neglect, and protected from harm." Congratulations on being nominated!

Toby has been a Direct Support Professional at Community, Work, & Independence, Inc. for 13 years. Toby is a valued member of our DSP Teams in the Day Service Division as well as the Community Services Division, and the Residential Division. She has a calm, confident demeanor that puts many people at ease as she supports them in daily activities that help them achieve their individual successes in group, solo, and community settings. Toby has a natural affinity for working with people of all abilities and is diligent in her pursuit towards getting to know individuals to develop positive relationships.



Toby maintains open communication with the people she supports and their circle of support to ensure goals and services are offered and viable within the understanding of schedules, environmental impact and support plans. Toby meets changes with grace and provides insightful feedback towards making the flow of change go smoothly for people at Quaker. Toby is a considerate advocate for all the people she supports in various settings. Toby maintained her active involvement in supporting people throughout the pandemic. Toby took an active part in supporting a person navigate their community resources and maintain personal well-being by adhering to the safety measures in place for COVID-19. The person was able to maintain their connections within their community and thrive. The positive impact of Toby was expressed at the person's Life Plan meeting, "My staff Toby has been the best. She is very kind, she listens to me, and she helps me a great deal with my goals. Toby is wonderful. I enjoy working with her."



Holly Lord is a Community Support Professional that provides Community Habilitation and/or Respite to individuals residing independently or with a family member in our local community.

Holly works with several very different individuals. When starting their shifts, she always speaks with the individual supported about what goals and activities they would like to achieve. Holly works with the Community Services team to develop plans on how to meet the individuals' goals. Holly has helped the individuals supported complete some of the following activities: learning about organic gardening, growing fruits and veggies in 5-gallon buckets, historical tours around upstate NY, and thrift store shopping.

Holly works with an individual who is visually impaired. She has assisted him to make his home safe while maintaining his independence. She has helped him set up bright safety cones around his property so that he can see the outline of his yard to complete landscaping. She has helped label the buttons on his stove and microwave so that he can independently cook for himself. She helps with meal prep and grocery shopping.

Holly really focuses on helping the individuals support maintain their independence. She has been known to research or reach out to other agencies, such as the blind association for resources. Holly wants each of the individuals she works with to be able to make informed choices about their own lives. She speaks with them about their goals and what is important to them. She helped one gentlemen research new medical providers when he was unhappy with his current medical provider. Holly is a highly dependable staff. She has a great moral compass and takes her job as a Community Support Professional seriously. Holly keeps an excellent line of communication with her supervisor.



## *And speaking of role models...Garrett Evans shares his milestones so far.....*

Garrett Evans is 28 years old and grew up in the Gansevoort area. He shares that he first became involved with CWI through a Youth Group. He wanted to improve his social skills, independence and comfort in social situations so he got together regularly with peers. The Youth Group staff helped to lead activities around topics such as personal hygiene and how to deal with stress. Garrett found this very helpful. Garrett credits his family as being a great support as well as his school team for teaching him budgeting skills and the payoffs of saving money. He earned his driver's license at age 19 (Bell's Driving School) and owns his own car.

As he was nearing the end of his high school years, he sought out Employment Supports where he worked on developing a resume, worked on preparing for interviews and on other job readiness skills. This paid off with a job at Market 32 where he has now worked for 7 years! Garrett has been flexible and has transferred a couple of times to different locations in the region. Garrett describes with pride how he has become an expert/pro at his job. (Shout outs to Tori and Jackie)

Garrett had always aspired to go to college after high school and with the help of his MSC got connected with CWI's Life Unlimited College Based supports. After almost 8 years and several changes in major, Garrett achieved his Associates in Science in the fall of 2020. (Shout outs to Charlie, Kari and Brandy) He continues with his college pursuits, now focusing on Culinary Arts mostly to improve his own cooking skills. So far, the coursework has been very interesting from Sanitization topics to Formal Dining.

Amidst the pandemic, Garrett found himself out of work for an extended period and participating in college courses remotely. He took this time to move out into his own apartment. He describes this as both exciting and stressful. There was a lot to buy, move and set up. Shopping during the pandemic was not easy. Now that he is settled in, with his cat, "Tonks" he says he is amazed and it feels good.

Whether it is his school or job or even managing his own apartment, Garrett's focus is on managing stress and taking care of priorities. He greatly appreciates the support from his family and the various staff he works with. He has a very busy schedule but manages well. His words of advice to others is: *"make sure to do your work, show up at priorities as scheduled, don't procrastinate, accept help to figure out busy schedules, be early, it's better than being late"*.

Garrett describes "good staff" as *"people who make things fun, motivate him to get out, are helpful, are OK with me saying no, I'm not interested and I don't have to worry about their feelings getting hurt. It is important that I can be honest, I'll say things nicely and good staff accept people's differences."*

Garrett's goals for the future include building on his career with Market 32 by taking on more hours once his schoolwork is finished. He describes himself as at an age where he "knows better" and is committed to his priorities (show up). He really likes to get out of his home and spend time working and with the friends he has made. He is achieving his goals!

***"It is important that I can be honest, I'll say things nicely and good staff accept people's differences."***

## Award Winning Efforts

CWI was awarded the 2021 Impact Prize from Foothold Technology for our innovative and comprehensive application of the Electronic Health Record system...AWARDS. HUGE thanks to all who participated over the past years to develop and implement this record keeping system. It is still a work in process; however, user feedback and innovation continues to improve its functionality on a regular basis. Amber Coppolo, DDCS and Victoria Minick, ABS presented of the innovations at the Foothold Virtual July Conference.



## BIG BAY IRA

Community, Work & Independence, Inc. (CWI) announces our closure of our Big Bay IRA. As many of you know, this colonial style home is not set up to safely support the four men for the long-term and their changes in mobility. More than one has struggled with timely evacuation from the second floor bedrooms. After ongoing dialog with OPWDD, they will not support us in renovating the home. CWI's residential division continues to operate with a significant staffing shortage as well as multiple ongoing openings (vacant beds) across the division. These four openings are all in barrier free, fully sprinkled/impractical fire rated homes.

CWI takes considerable pride in the quality of services we provide and are committed to the 4 men at Big Bay. We have continued to provide quality services to the gentlemen at Big Bay throughout this transition. We accomplished our goal to make the exploration and relocation to other opportunities as seamless as possible, using a person-centered, individualized approach. We met with the individuals, their families/advocates, care managers, and clinicians, as we examined other residential options. We held meetings and tours in order to provide individuals and their teams sufficient time to visit and to become comfortable with their options for this relocation. All four men have made their decisions and as of the printing of this news article, have all moved in.

We recognize the emotional toll this type of decision places on all involved. We can't say enough about our residential team members. The Big Bay staff who are also impacted by the closure have been steadfast supporters of these men and have worked with the residential management team and HR to determine their next assignments. THANK YOU!! The residential team members receiving new residents in their home are equally as important in this transition. Times are rocky even without the challenges of acclimating someone to a new environment and supporting the housemates to do the same.

THANK YOU AS WELL! "We are better together."

**---98% of the people who reside in CWI supported homes are fully vaccinated against COVID-19**



Jeff—Pearl Street IRA



Joey—Fuller Road IRA



Big Bay IRA



Donnie—Men of Moreau



Marvin—Ryan Ave. IRA

# OUR BUSY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Site based services have continued to remain open but restricted attendance due to restrictions with transportation rules as well as with social distancing rules, we have worked to find ways to include interested people awaiting the opportunity to resume their services. Efforts have also been hampered by a severely stretched workforce.

(see workforce article for more details). The dedicated staff who have been working in these service areas have been enthusiastic and creative in supporting people to pursue meaningful experiences. Just look at their faces to see how impactful this is.....

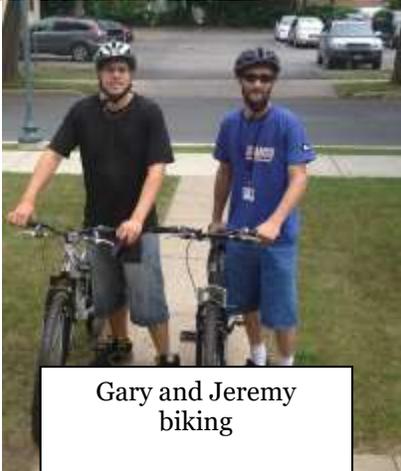
**--over 60% of people served in Day Habilitation and/or Community Prevocational Services are fully vaccinated against COVID-19**



Gabe and Tony Gardening at New Beginnings



Quaker Road Spirit



Gary and Jeremy biking



Jamie Cleaning Kennels



Scott and Michael working the computers

Pathways Nature Hike



You have a Happy Friday too Rachael!



Jake at the park



FRR Ladies at the Lake



Bryan and Brenna climbing



More Quaker Spirit!



Jeff catching a big one!

## HOW CAN OTHERS HELP..... Fundraising—

Brooks BBQ - We hope you enjoyed your dinner!

CWI, like many others, has encountered unique challenges in 2020 and into 2021. More than ever we count on the generosity of our community so we can give back to our community. Everyone's efforts contributed to a successful event! Thank you to all for the role you played in our success whether it was purchasing a dinner, providing sponsorship, making a donation or helping publicize the event. CWI netted nearly \$5,000 in this venture!

Some BBQ Fun Facts:

We met our goal of selling 500 dinners-that's A LOT of chicken  
Of the 500 dinners, 119 of them were "Walk-Ins"

We had 24 members of our CWI family volunteering their time to help the event run smoothly. This included employees, residents and members of our Board of Directors

**SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR NEXT BROOKS BBQ----  
Friday, NOVEMBER 12, 2021**

Wish List: We appreciate all of the donations to our "Spring Wish List" including items to support activities with many of our individuals to help get them outdoors and participating in a hobby they enjoy. Two of our programs received a larger TV screen (55") to enable all of the individuals in the room to see the screen.

Below is our current wish list. If you can help by supplying any of the items below, please call Noel Granger, Division Director of Day Services at 518 793-4700, ext. 12114 or email at [ngranger@cwinc.org](mailto:ngranger@cwinc.org) and we can pick up from you or arrange for you to drop them off. (We can also let you know in case the item has already been purchased.) Thank you in advance for your support during this critical year! Those we serve are so excited to be resuming their usual activities.

- ◆ Gardening gloves (8 pairs per site)
- ◆ Dining canopies (a total of 8) for some of our sites to provide outdoor shade. [https://www.amazon.com/MasterCanopy-Compact-Portable-Instant-Circulation/dp/B07QNJF4YW/ref=sr\\_1\\_6?dchild=1&keywords=pop+up+canopy&qid=1625597310&sr=8-6](https://www.amazon.com/MasterCanopy-Compact-Portable-Instant-Circulation/dp/B07QNJF4YW/ref=sr_1_6?dchild=1&keywords=pop+up+canopy&qid=1625597310&sr=8-6)
- ◆ Skip Bo cards [https://www.amazon.com/Mattel-Games-1050-SKIP-Card/dp/B0000205X1/ref=asc\\_df\\_B0000205X1/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312115015182&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=144591](https://www.amazon.com/Mattel-Games-1050-SKIP-Card/dp/B0000205X1/ref=asc_df_B0000205X1/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312115015182&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=144591)
- ◆ 2 Roku Players



Some of our wonderful volunteers



Helping Hands Gardening

- ◆ Assorted craft supplies: glue sticks, poster board, colored markers, crayons, colored paper, glitter
- ◆ Hand held vacuum
- ◆ Corn hole set
- ◆ Basketballs and basketball pump
- ◆ Beach balls
- ◆ Beach towels
- ◆ Volleyball/Badminton Set
- ◆ Gardening gift cards (e.g., Lowe's, Garden Time, Binley's)
- ◆ Gift cards to Joann Fabric or Hobby Lobby for craft supplies

**---100% of CWI staff who wanted the vaccine for COVID-19 have received it**



Kim and Marcus

### Recruiting New Staff

Have you heard the term “full court press”? That is what our recruitment efforts are. Serious shortages in staffing are directly attributable to the lack of a pool of candidates applying for work. Rates of people leaving the organization vs the rate of people joining is significantly out of balance. Many, many thanks are owed to the team who is working not just their scheduled hours but picking up many, many, many more to ensure that the people we serve are safe and supported. This extends beyond our DSPs to our clinical team members, managers, administrative staff, operations staff, etc. THANK YOU ALL!!

**NOTE: CWI employees continue to be eligible for the Referral Bonus where the referring employee will receive a \$250 taxable bonus per each qualifying employee referred.**



### HOW CAN OTHERS HELP, CONT.

**AmazonSmile** is a simple and automatic way for you to support CWI each time you shop, at no cost to you! When you shop at [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/smile), you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to CWI. Amazon donates .5% of your purchases to the charity of your choice. It's free to use and makes a donation for purchases you were going to make anyway.

Log into your Amazon account and enter Smile.Amazon into the search bar, click on “Change your Charity,” and enter CWI into the search box, we are the fourth one down.

**Targeted Donation** For over 50 years, CWI has been enriching lives and empowering people to discover their potential. We have been able to significantly impact lives through innovative supports and services. Contributions have become a more important source of revenue for human services organizations as we have endured significant reductions in government funding. With your help, we can continue with our mission of empowering people and enriching lives throughout our community. We gladly accept: Cash, Check, or Money Order Donations. Go to [www.cwinc.org](https://www.cwinc.org) and click Donate.



Erik and Urban

***The NY Alliance supported pieces of legislation that unfortunately did not pass both houses. Such bills include the following subjects: direct support professional credential pilot program, housing navigation, provider reimbursement of COVID-19 expenses, customized employment demonstration program, public awareness campaign to combat stigma, and an OPWDD waitlist bill.***

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