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Future LEADer Kristen Camacho and mentor Rick Murray, from Align Credit Union, working on LEAD's year-ending project. See inside LEAD.

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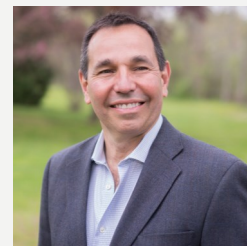
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Message From Mike

What a difference a year makes! Last year at this time we were known as Greater Marlborough Programs, serving 15 Metrowest communities. Today, as Thrive Support & Advocacy, we proudly provide services to 42 Massachusetts cities and towns.



Together with our kind and generous supporters, volunteers, and donors, we are bringing Thrive's leading edge services to more children, adults, and families than ever before. Among our notable initiatives are:

- Outreach to Portuguese-speaking and LGBTQ communities – Thrive's reaches these underserved populations to delivers an array of supports in a culturally competent and sensitive manner.
- Leadership Experience And Development (LEAD) – We're wrapping up our first full year of training young adults with developmental disabilities who want to make the world a better place. I can't wait to see what these young men and women will do next.
- Social and recreational – At least twenty days out of every month, Thrive provides a range of social, recreational and sports activities to youth and adults. These are real opportunities for Thrivers to experience, contribute, and connect to their communities.

These three areas of service share one characteristic – they exist because you support them. Thrive currently receives no public funding for these activities, which are essential to empower children, adults, and families to lead rich, active and self-directed lives.

I invite you to join the Thrive community. You'll experience a sense of fulfillment that is priceless. Please contact me to learn more at mrodrigues@icanthrive.org.

Sincerely,

Mike

Michael A. Rodrigues, President & CEO

Family Focus

We find answers, advocate for change, offer respite, reframe challenges, and celebrate accomplishments.

On the Road to Independence

“Independence is happiness.”

– Susan B. Anthony

We all strive to do things on our own and live independently. Thrive participant Beth Donahue is no different. From a young age, Beth has always blazed her own path. Now, at the age of 27, and on the verge of finishing her college studies, she is looking to spread her wings and forge her unique path as an adult. Her first step, get from here to there without help from her family or as Thrive calls it “transportation independence.”

With guidance from Thrive Support & Advocacy’s family support team and Carl Damigella, Director of Community Relations and Outreach for the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA), Beth is well on her way to achieving her dream. Her end goal is to live independently and use public transportation to commute to work, the grocery store, and other significant locations of everyday life. A patron of MWRTA’s Dial-A-Ride service, Beth currently uses this service to get to and from work.

Beth’s next big step, to begin using the MWRTA fixed route buses. The buses offer 14 routes, servicing 16 member communities. The MWRTA’s Carl Damigella and his co-worker Ieshia Price, arrange travel training for those who want to learn to ride the bus and need a helping hand navigating the system. The two are working closely with Beth to help her master the routes. Beth explained, “Carl has been teaching me how to read the schedule of the fixed routes, look for bus stops, and read the signs on the bus to see where it is going. He has shown me the many places I can get to just by learning how to use public transportation. I am so excited!”

So far Beth’s experience has been extremely positive. “Everyone from the MWRTA is really helpful,” she shared. After meeting a few times to review logistics, Carl will be spending the next few meetings riding the buses with Beth so she can get some hands-on training. They will also cover issues such as walking to and from the bus stops and crossing roads to get to the stops. Once Beth masters these skills she will execute test runs on her most essential routes then she’ll be set to travel on her own with continued support from Damigella and Price. With their help, she is well on her way to taking the first step in reaching her goal of living independently. If you are interested in taking part in this program, contact familysupport@icanthrive.org.



Thrive’s Beth Donahue and MWRTA’s Carl Damigella.

Family Focus continued

We find answers, advocate for change, offer respite, reframe challenges, and celebrate accomplishments.

LEADers Demonstrating What They've Learned

Thrive's eight future LEADers are heading into the homestretch of their program which ends in June. In these final months, they are designing and implementing a number of community service projects to put into action the leadership skills they've honed over the past months. In collaboration with mentors from Advance Math and Science Academy (AMSA) LEADers will be organizing a fundraiser for Cat Rescue of Marlborough and Hudson (CaRMaH). The group is also planning on coordinating a cleanup effort for Marlborough's Earth Day in late April. Lastly, they will be working closely with the Heroes Cup Hockey Tournament to implement a letter-writing and gift bag program to first responders thanking them for their service.



Thrive future LEADers, LEAD mentors, volunteers, and staff.

Follow our facebook page to see photos and details on how the future LEADers are demonstrating their leadership skills in the community and beyond. To learn more about the LEAD initiative contact Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler at cdfortwengler@icanthrive.org or 508-485-4227 x1009.

Friends of Thrive Corner

Organizations and friends who share our mission of empowering individuals to find opportunities to shine.

Thank you to the following organizations who have offered generous grants to support Thrive:

- Mark Fidrych Foundation
- Foundation for Metrowest – Family Support Grant Program
- Foundation for Metrowest – Southborough Community Fund
- Marlborough Brigham Family Trust
- DCU for Kids
- Greater Worcester Community Foundation – Youth for Community Improvement Fund
- Avidia Charitable Foundation
- Main Street Bank Charitable Foundation

And to the following organizations and individuals who donated essential items and equipment:

- Dell/EMC
- Amica Insurance – Roche Family
- Mr. Glenn Mangurian



From left: Inna Voloshina, AVP, Branch Manager, Main Street Bank; Michael Rodrigues, President & CEO Thrive Support & Advocacy; and Sebi Ovesian, SVP, Loan Operations, Main

Social Connections

Providing real opportunities for our participants to become a part of the community around them.

Player Turned Coach Loves Sharing His Skills

All athletes strive to make it to “the big game.” In professional basketball “the big game” is the NBA Finals and for college ball, it’s March Madness. In the Thrive community, it’s making it to Special Olympics season-ending tournaments. For all of Thrive’s teams, Red Hawks, Sky Hawks, Wolfpack and the young Jedi team, their hard work paid off by making it to their “big game” of the 2018 basketball season. But no one makes it to the top without great coaching.

One of the major players contributing to the Sky Hawks on-court success is coach Kevin Lutz. A former Special Olympics athlete for Hawks,

Kevin is now assistant coach of the team helping head Coach Dan McCarthy. Until several years ago, Kevin was an enthusiastic member of the team. As he got on in years, he decided to retire from active play. Being



Assistant Coach Kevin Lutz.

on the sidelines, Kevin found a new passion for coaching. He realized quickly that the talent he acquired while playing could be parlayed into helping players improve their skills.



Coach Lutz helping to lead his team during Special Olympics Winter Games.

basketball in my thirty years of playing.” When comparing the differences between playing and coaching Kevin jokes, “you don’t have to do warm-ups!”

With a few years of coaching under his belt, Kevin is looking to the future. He aims to be a head coach of his own team someday. Thanks in part to the skillful coaching of coaches McCarthy and Lutz, the Sky Hawks dribbled their way to the silver medal at the 2018 Special Olympics Winter Games. Thrive’s Red Hawks, Sky Hawks, Wolfpack and Jedi basketball teams demonstrated to us all that “victory comes in having done your best. If you’ve done your best you’ve won!” Congratulations to all of Thrive’s winners, on the court and in life.

Community Living

A home is where we find the space, comfort, and safety to be ourselves and nurture our personal needs.

Night to Shine Prom Event

Going to prom is a rite of passage for most teenagers. Many adults have fond memories of that evening. From the preparation of choosing the perfect attire and beauty choices to dance the night away in an elegant ballroom, it's a memory of a lifetime. Those with developmental or intellectual challenges often don't have the opportunity to create such memories. That is until now.

On Friday, February 9, 2018, a contingent of Thrivers donned their glamorous dresses and tuxedos, pinned on their corsages and boutonnieres, and headed for the red carpet entrance at the annual Night to Shine prom event in Uxbridge, MA sponsored by the Valley Chapel. Thanks to participant Kristen Camacho and her family, Thrivers were



From left Thrivers Kathy Donahue, Brenda Flint, Sandy Seminuk, Kristen Comacha, Sharon Myrick. Back from left Rob McKeever, Tim Cummings.



From left Thrivers Rob McKeever and Brenda Flint.

pampered with pre-prom beauty treatments. Then, for that one night, the 100 guests at the Uxbridge event got to experience firsthand the joy of creating memories that will last forever.

Night to Shine is an annual event, sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation, that takes place on the same night each year, at over 540 churches across 50 states and 16 countries for approximately 90,000 honored guests through the support of 175,000 volunteers. Our Thrivers headed to the Faith Fellowship Church for a night they'll never forget.

From start to finish the evening was packed with activities. Each participant was assigned a volunteer "buddy" who stayed by their side the entire evening. With a limousine ride, karaoke, a formal dinner, and dancing in the ballroom, there was something for everyone. And the crowning moment of the evening was just that! Volunteers crowned each participant king and queen of the prom. "I will remember this night for a long time! My favorite part was the limousine. It was my first time in one and we even got to have soda during the ride" exclaimed Thriver Brenda Flint. "Words can't explain how wonderful this evening was for our participants. The volunteers were so thoughtful and attentive. They made everyone feel remarkably special," observed Thrive Supervisor Patty Durkin. "We can't wait for next year," she added.



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A group of six young people, three men and three women, are standing in a row against a green backdrop. They are all wearing orange t-shirts with the "JEDI" logo and "Special Olympics Massachusetts" text. The person second from the left is making a peace sign with their right hand. The person fourth from the left is holding a basketball. The person sixth from the left is wearing glasses. The text "A well-lived life is a collection of well-lived moments." is overlaid in the center of the image in a dark blue, serif font.

**A well-lived life is a
collection of well-lived
moments.**