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Message From Mike

As we close out 2018, I marvel at the amazing ways that Thrivers are living their best lives and reaching their unique potential. In the cover letter of this package, I shared the story of Jackie, a Thrive participant who graduated from the LEAD program and went on to use her newly learned skills to bring joy to seniors in an assisted living center as a volunteer. Jackie is just one of many stories about participants impacting their communities and creating well-lived moments.



As most of you know, Thrive's mission is to empower children and adults with developmental disabilities to lead rich, active and self-directed lives. At Thrive we offer our participants the tools they need to accomplish great things, then tell the stories, like Jackie's. But, none of this would be possible without your support as a member of the Thrive community. From participants to family members and volunteers to financial supporters, everyone plays a role in these successes. While it's the participants who are putting themselves out there every day, it's the rest of us who stand in the background lending a helping hand, offering a pat on the back, or giving a high five when needed.

This incredible community is what inspires us to provide leading-edge experiences, programs, and services to our participants and families every day. We are looking forward to the coming year and offering more opportunities, to more people, in more communities, and impacting more lives. I thank you for being a part of the community and spreading the word about Thrive. We are so excited about 2019 and know that the best is yet to come!

Best,

Mike Rodrigues
President & CEO

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

We choose to see gifts before challenges and empower everyone to realize their own greatness.

Thrive is Planning for the Future

"We know that the earlier you reach a child with a disability, and his or her family, the more impact you can have on their lives," shared Thrive President and CEO Michael Rodrigues. For that reason, Thrive has focused efforts on reaching children with disabilities earlier by keeping children engaged after school.

Two years ago, when Thrive started Kids' Club and Thrive After School Community (TASC), we realized that

cutting-edge programs to address those needs.

"With the plan in the process of being finalized, we are hoping to start rolling out some of the ideas as soon as this spring," reported President & CEO Mike Rodrigues. First up, expanding Thrive's existing programs. "There are families we have not yet reached with our offerings. By making these programs more accessible to people across MetroWest, we are expecting to have a greater impact with more families immediately," stated Rodrigues.

Looking out ten years, the plan is to have a state-of-the-art Family Support Center where families and their children can access the help they need and connect with others. A sampling of programs that may be a result of the ten-year plan are weekend social activities,



Dodge ball at TASC's Knucklebones class

continuing social and educational interaction for those with developmental challenges after the school day ended is essential. "What we saw were many children heading straight home after school and not having the opportunity to connect with their peers on a social level as other children often do," stated Director of Youth Services Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler. Born from those after-school initiatives, Thrive has developed a ten-year plan to identify unmet needs in the youth and young adult communities, and create

We know that the earlier we can reach a child with developmental or intellectual disabilities, and his or her family, the more positive impact we can have on their lives.

Mike Rodrigues
President & CEO

initiatives for children age 6-10, help with 22 year old transitioning, weekend and weeknight respite services, and offerings for young adults over 22 with autism spectrum disorder. ■

FAMILIES FOCUS

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

It's About Living Your Best Life

Life is all about setting goals then working hard to achieve them. Nicole Rechel, a shining star in our Thrive community, has done just that.

For years, Nicole longed to live in her own place where she could do what she wanted when she wanted. As a resident of a local group home, she had some hard work ahead of her to achieve this goal. Working with staff, she learned to master the skills of "caring for myself, cleaning, cooking for myself, managing my finances, coordinating my medical needs and advocating for myself," according to Nicole.

In March of 2013, Nicole achieved that goal and moved into her own apartment in MetroWest. For most, going from living in a group residence to independent

living would have been a significant transition. Nicole was so well-prepared, it took her about 24 hours to adjust. "The first day I was shy and nervous to meet new people. By the second day I opened up and started making new friends," she boasted. Now, a close friend calls her "Nicole the roadrunner," because she is always running somewhere. At home, Nicole shares common living space with other roommates, where they all pitch in with cooking and cleaning. "Nicole has mastered so many skills that others often need help doing. Not only does she manage her own financial, medical, and personal needs, she has also mastered the skill of time management, by juggling work, attending

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FAMILIES FOCUS CONTINUED

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

Best Life *continued*



Nicole living her best life at the library of her day program.

a day program, and planning an active social life," commented Nanette Goldstein, Director of Family and Individual Support at Thrive.

Weekdays include work and attending a day program, where, among other activities, she volunteers for Meals on Wheels and the local food pantry. Nights

and weekends are devoted to eating out and traveling to local farms, the library, museums, plays, and tourist destinations such as Rockport, MA or the coast of Maine. Nicole's favorite fall activity is cheering on the Coast Guard Academy football team at home games with her close friend and travel partner Jack.

Nicole has learned much by living on her own, but the skill she is most proud of is her ability to advocate for herself in a variety of situations. "I love being able to speak up for myself when I want something. It is a very important thing to do," Nicole shared. Congratulations to Nicole for setting a goal many years ago, working hard to achieve it, and going on to live her best life! ■

COMMUNITY LIVING

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

Family Vacations Thrive Style

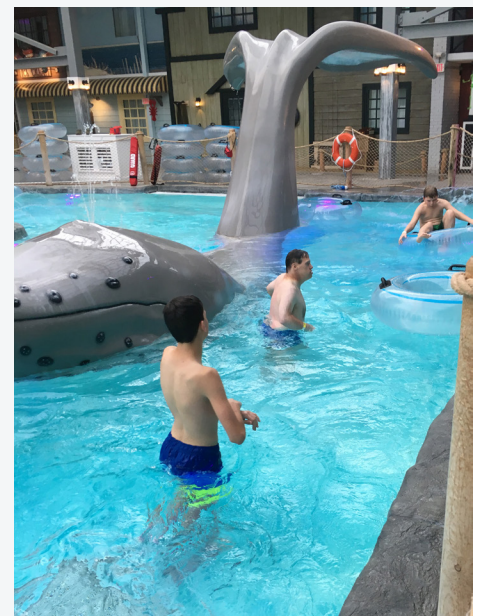
Every year more than a third of Americans take a family vacation. For some, it's a long distance road trip, while for others it's a staycation. Thrive residents took their family vacations this summer and fall, each to a different destination

If you've never heard of Great Wolf Lodge, Thrivers Phillip and Joel can tell you all about it. This summer they spent a long weekend at the Lodge relaxing in the wave pool and mastering the video games in the arcade. It was a great escape for some summertime fun and cooling off.

Who else went on a road trip? The folks at Thrive's Fairmount residence headed to swanky Newport this summer to visit the Audrain Car Museum. The museum boasts ownership of more than 200 rare vehicles which rotate in and out of an ever-changing exhibit of twenty vehi-

cles at a time. Following the museum, the Fairmount family headed out for a summertime lunch of lobster rolls and clam chowder. For Thriver Nate Burns it was a perfect day. "The cars were great, the food was good, and the people were very nice. Let's go again!" he exclaimed.

Last up? Summer was extended into fall for Thrive's Liberty residents. They enjoyed a family vacation to Hyannis' Cape Codder Resort. Over the three days, two-night vacation Thrivers hung out at the pool, tried out some new restaurants, and enjoyed each other's company. Like any other family vacation, they had to agree on how to spend their time. And for each of them, a different memory stands out ... Jeff shared "my lobster was awesome," Joel added "I loved the ice cream," Ronnie said, "it was exciting to try different foods," and Phil summed up everyone's thoughts by



Swimming fun at the Cape Codder Resort
sharing "I would love to go back." All and all it was an exciting summer filled with an array of adventures and family fun! ■

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

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

Fidrych Foundation Gives Back

The mission of The Mark Fidrych Foundation is to "enhance the lives of children and adults with disabilities and/or special needs through and with a focus on sports and sports education." For Ann Fidrych, Mark's widow, the Foundation is merely a continuation of Mark's legacy of giving back to his community. Thrive Support & Advocacy was a fortunate recipient of the Foundation's generosity this year.

Fidrych, nicknamed "The Bird," was a colorful and well-known major league baseball pitcher who grew up in Northborough, MA. In 1974 he was drafted into minor league baseball from high school and went on to play his entire career with the Detroit Tigers. After his retirement from baseball in 1980, he moved back to his hometown of Northborough to settle down and raise his family. Tragically, Mark lost his life in an accident in 2009. In the time following, Ann Fidrych wanted to find a way to carry on her husband's legacy of giving back. The foundation

Mark Fidrych Foundation

The Legacy of Mark Fidrych

was created "as a tribute to Mark and a continuation of the way he lived his life of giving to others."

Since its origination, the Foundation has donated more than \$325,000, with a focus on supporting local organizations. "Because Mark had a special relationship with those with developmental or intellectual challenges, we chose to focus our efforts in that community," Ann shared. "With Thrive we found that our missions are aligned. One of my neighbors participates in Thrive's Social & Recreational programs. Because of this we've seen firsthand how Thrive impacts the lives of their participants, and we wanted to support that effort," Ann added.

The Foundation runs a number of events to raise money for their grants. The Make

Your Mark Softball Tournament, which happens annually in August, is their most significant event. "This year we had 11 teams competing and raised more than \$80,000. We are shooting for a bigger and better event in 2019." When asked what people should know about your husband, Ann replied "My husband gave his time and was very selfless. Follow in his footsteps by enjoying life and giving back, and don't forget that every day is a gift."

Thank you to the Mark Fidrych Foundation for making a difference in the lives of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. Your impact will be seen for decades, and your family is creating a wonderful legacy in memory of Mark. ■

OTHER NEWS

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

Opportunity for Giving This Holiday Season

Thrive's Self-Advocates Group is working with the United Way of Tri-County to collect unopened toys and canned goods for families in need. Donations can be dropped off at Thrive headquarters at 65 Boston Post Road West, Suite 220, Marlborough. Gifts are distributed through the United Way and go to families in need in 34 communities in the Metrowest area.

"Thrive's Self-Advocates Group is comprised of Thrivers who are actively engaged in advocating for themselves and others, and bringing their voices to the community." shared group coordinator Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler. The Group meets monthly to discuss relevant topics and share ideas. Support the Group and those in need by dropping off an item between now and December 15. Start your holiday season of giving by helping brighten the holiday for someone in need ■

Thrive Self-Advocates Holiday Giving Campaign.

The Self-Advocacy group will collect canned goods and unopened toys for United Way of Tri-County. Donation boxes can be found at Thrive, 65 Boston Post Road West, Suite 220, Marlborough.

We ask that all donations be delivered by December 15, 2018.

For more information contact Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler at edfortwengler@icanthrive.org

