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In this Issue

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Volunteer Connects in a Special Way

FAMILY FOCUS

A Place of My Own

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Thank You to "Race" Supporters

COMMUNITY LIVING

Living a Healthy Lifestyle

OTHER NEWS

Standing Ovation Award

Thrive Partnering with PUR Water

Thanksgiving Drive Thank You

Holiday Wish List Drive



Thrive's Youth Small Group Hangout getting together for a COVID-safe apple picking trip to Tougas Farm, Northborough.

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icanthrive.salsalabs.org/emailsignup

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CHECK OUT

Our Website

www.icanthrive.org

Holiday Wish List Drive

The holidays are just around the corner, and thirty of our Thrive families need a little extra assistance this year! Working in conjunction with our staff, these families have created a *Holiday Wish List* on Amazon. Our goal is to collect monetary donations so that Thrive staff can purchase each families' wish list items and deliver their gifts in time for the holidays.

See page 4 for details

LEARN ABOUT

Upcoming events at

www.icanthrive.org/calendar

Message From Sean

Thrive Strong has truly been exemplified over the last several months. We have seen our lives change due to COVID-19. We've had to be mindful of who interact with and how we protect ourselves and others. This new and unforeseen reality has impacted us immensely and in different ways.

It has created a layer of stress and anxiety that many of us may have never experienced before. It would be natural for this tension to bubble over into our personal and professional lives, as well as our self-esteem. However, that has not been what I have seen or felt from Thrive staff amidst the pandemic. I have seen an outpouring of compassion, exemplary care, a renewed willingness to evolve, a leadership bond through adversity, and resilience that is unmatched.

As a result, we have not missed a beat. One of the few positives from the pandemic, or our new norm, is how we all became better people, professionals, and caregivers. We know what strength means now more than we ever had.

This newsletter will bring you stories of **Thrive Strong** and the **resilience** that our participants have shown throughout this challenging year. I hope you find inspiration from the stories.

Warm regards,

Sean Rose, President & CEO



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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

Volunteer Connects In a Special Way



Jackie Quetti (left) volunteering at TASC with Thrive participants.

Resiliency and determination are part of Jackie Quetti's DNA. Jackie, a volunteer with Thrive Support & Advocacy's youth programs was diagnosed with epilepsy at the age of five. She kept her diagnosis to herself until, at age 17, a medication switch caused her to have her first tonic clonic seizure. This seizure was a life-changing event for Jackie. It pushed her to realize that she had to share her story with others and raise awareness about this condition.

Looking for a way to make her voice be heard, Jackie became involved with The Epilepsy Foundation. She organized local walk/runs to raise money, represented at two national conferences for the Foundation, and brought awareness to the needs of those with epilepsy on a state and national level. Jackie also brought her message to children with epilepsy by working at summer camps for children with the health condition.

"I want kids to see that they are not alone; that whatever goals they set can be achieved if they set their mind to it, and that this condition should not limit them," Jackie shared.

Setting goals is something Jackie has been doing since her teenage years. She found her love for running in high school and has since run four half marathons and one full marathon. She graduated college and recently decided to move out on her own, settling in Marlborough. After the move, Jackie was in search of a way to give back to her new community. She learned about Thrive

and its mission through her sister.

When Jackie connected with Thrive's Director of Youth Services, Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler, she knew this was the place for her, and Caitlin felt the same. In addition to living with epilepsy, Jackie grew up with a learning disability. These experiences give Jackie a unique connection to Thrive's youth participants. "I love seeing the happiness on the kids' faces when they see each other and work together on projects. I feel like I can relate to them on a different level because we have been through many of the same experiences with our challenges," Jackie added.

"I love working with kids and hope to make that my vocation someday," she shared. "My family, faith, and love for running are what keep me grounded, and looking ahead, my future is bright. We are so thankful and honored to have Jackie Quetti as a part of Thrive Support & Advocacy's youth team. ■

FAMILIES FOCUS

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

A Place of My Own

Jonathan Blaszczak was raised by a family that taught him to be independent. He prides himself on doing things on his own. For years, his goal was to have his own apartment, and a pandemic was not going to stop him.

When Jonathan started with Thrive's Individual Support Program, he was residing in a group living situation. He had a bedroom to himself but needed to share common spaces with others in the house. Jonathan longed to have his own place where his family could visit, and he could relax.

After working with Thrive staff to fill out applications and looking at apart-

ments, Jonathan found the perfect one-bedroom space. On June 1, 2020, not letting the pandemic slow him down, Jonathan's dream came true, and he moved into his own place.

"Jonathan was completely in the driver's seat in accomplishing this goal," shared Nanette Goldstein, Director of Individual Support. "Thrive staff supported him, but he was the one who worked hard to gain the skills needed to live independently," she continued.

When Jonathan is not in his apartment reading, or watching sports and horror movies, you can find him working at Stop & Shop, where he has been



Jonathan Blaszczak (left) enjoying down time with Thrive staff.

employed for eight years. Although attaining his goal did not come easy, Jonathan never gave up, and it paid off. "I love living on my own and having space for my family to visit. I am so proud of myself for doing what I set out to do," Jonathan boasted. For his determination and resilience, we salute Jonathan Blaszczak. ■

COMMUNITY LIVING

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

Living a Healthy Lifestyle

Losing weight is never easy. This is especially true during a pandemic when people can barely leave their homes, and all routines are turned upside down. But for Ben Cohen, a participant in Thrive Support & Advocacy's residential program, the pandemic restrictions have given him a new resilience and outlook. Ben has set a goal of losing fifty pounds and is well on his way to achieving that goal.

When the stay at home order hit, Ben was restricted from going to the gym. That's when he took matters into his own hands. With the help of staff, Ben started walking twice a day. He also changed his eating habits by eliminating sugar from his diet and replacing carbohydrates with various vegetables. His only splurge? Once a

week allowing himself to eat and drink whatever he wants, within reason!

Ben realizes exercise is also an essential part of losing weight. He now walks or runs at the local park twice a day. He often logs an impressive five to six miles per day. To date, Ben has lost more than twenty-five pounds and is looking forward to reaching his goal. "I feel healthier and sleep a lot better. Plus, I also feel much lighter and have more energy," shared Ben. Next on the list of goals to achieve, "learning to prepare and cook an entire meal by myself," Ben added. We know that whatever Ben puts his mind to, he can do. Congratulations to Ben Cohen for sharing his resilient spirit and creating a healthier lifestyle for himself. ■



Ben Cohen before (left) and after (right) losing twenty-five pounds.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

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

Thank You to "Race That Wasn't" Supporters



"Race that Wasn't" t-shirts.

Canceling our most profitable fundraiser of the year could have been detrimental to Thrive Support & Advocacy. But that was not the case, thanks to our dedicated supporters who stepped up in a big way.

Although we couldn't come together in person this year, we created a fundraiser featuring the "Race That

Wasn't." Thrive offered sponsorships, race t-shirts, and recognition for donors. In response, our corporate partners and individual donors created quite a buzz. We raised more than \$16,000 through the "Race that Wasn't," just a few thousand dollars shy of our 2019 race revenue.

There are so many to thank for this incredible feat, starting with our corporate sponsors. A heartfelt THANK YOU goes out to: The Buckley Group-DVI Inv. Liquidating Trust, Avidia Bank, Boston Document Systems, Curry Printing, GL Auto, Murphy Insurance, Northside Marina-Sesuit Harbor, St. Mary's Credit Union, Sullivan Memorial Golf Tournament, Team Hoyt, and Wakefly, Inc. In addition, Thrive extends a virtual handshake to our many individual donors

OTHER NEWS

Additional ways that Thrive participants and friends go above and beyond every day.

Thrive Thanksgiving Food Drive

A sincere thank you to everyone who donated to Thrive's Thanksgiving Food Drive. Bringing Thanksgiving dinner to sixteen families was indeed a team effort. A special thank you to Wegmans, Northborough for donating the turkeys. Plus, we had more than seventy-five people offer food or financial donations. Thrive's residential programs took pride in decorating the Thanksgiving food boxes and youth participants created cards of inspiration, which were added to each family's package. Thanks to each of you, these families experienced a little extra joy this Thanksgiving. ■



Thanksgiving boxes ready for delivery.

many of whom were featured on the back of the race shirt.

Race shirts are still available and are complimentary with a \$25 donation. To donate, visit our website at www.ican-thrive.org/forrest. The money raised supports Thrive's social and recreational experiences. We hope to see you on the racecourse in 2021. ■

RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS

For those whose commitment to the organization deserve to be recognized by the entire Thrive community.

"Standing Ovation Award" ... and it goes to ...

The amazing staff members and community partners of Thrive Support & Advocacy exceed our expectations and set a high bar for care and compassion every day. That drive, empathy, and dedication are ingrained into the Thrive culture. Occasionally, however, we see those who exceed these goals and go above and beyond to demonstrate what it truly means to be a Thriver. These people profoundly affect the lives of others.

In 2020 and moving forward, Thrive will recognize these beacons of light with our annual *Standing Ovation Award*. This award will go to an individual or team within the organization, as well as a partner from outside the organization, who deserve a resounding standing ovation from the Thrive community. We are pleased to announce that this year's *Standing Ovation Award* recipient is Michelle Lariviere, Pleasant Street Residential Program Director, and community partner SLH Medical Supply in Webster, MA. Here are their stories.

Michelle has been with Thrive for almost thirty years as program director at our Pleasant Street residence. She oversees thirteen of our residential participants and fifteen staff. To understand her impact, just ask her team, "Michelle is like a second mother to many of our residents. She goes above and beyond to meet the needs of the residents and her staff. She is always there to listen. One day this year, she did something that none of us will ever forget!" stated Patty Durkin, Shift Supervisor at Pleasant Street.

What started as a typical Wednesday evening escalated to a life or death situation quickly. When one of the residents was having trouble descending the stairs, Michelle noticed and started to assist. Then the unthinkable happened. This individual dropped to the ground, and their

heart stopped. That's when Michelle and another staff member jumped into action, starting CPR, getting the house defibrillator, and calling 911. Thanks to their quick response, and the care of Marlborough paramedics, our longtime resident made a full recovery. For her life-saving actions, Thrive would like to honor Michelle Lariviere with the first annual *Standing Ovation Award*. Words cannot begin to describe the admiration and appreciation we have for Michelle's selfless actions and dedication to her residents and the organization.

Our community partnerships are equally as valuable to us. Thrive has many vital partners that support the organization, but SLH Medical Supply stepped up this year when we needed help the most. When COVID hit, many in the Thrive residential population and staff were at risk. With Personal Protective Equipment nearly impossible to find, SLH, who previously did not know Thrive, responded to our request by supplying much-needed supplies, at an affordable price, without question. While larger agencies had greater access to these supplies, smaller ones like Thrive were left to manage independently. SLH's support at

such a crucial time saved lives. For these reasons, we proudly honor SLH Medical with the first annual *Standing Ovation Award*. We are excited to celebrate our new partner and thank them for their commitment to Thrive. Congratulations to both of our recipients. ■



Standing Ovation Award recipient Michael Pelletz, CEO SLH Medical Supply (left) and Thrive President & CEO Sean Rose (right).



Standing Ovation Award recipient Michelle Lariviere (center), with Thrive President Sean Rose (right) and Thrive Vice President Denise Vojackova-Karami (left).

OTHER NEWS

Additional ways that Thrive participants and friends go above and beyond every day.

Thrive Holiday Wish List Drive

Working with our staff, thirty Thrive families have created a *Holiday Wish List* on Amazon. Our goal is to collect donations so that Thrive staff can purchase wish list items for these families. To learn more or donate, go to www.icanthrive.org/event/holiday.

Partnership with PUR Water

Thrive Support & Advocacy is excited to announce a partnership with PUR Water, a Helen of Troy Limited brand. The PUR partnership includes working with Thrive youth to spread the message of the importance of clean water solutions, the distribution of PUR products, and support for youth programs through a grant. More to come on this partnership. ■