

icanthrive.org

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## CHECK OUT

### Our Website

[www.icanthrive.org](https://www.icanthrive.org)

### Forrest Memorial Road Race

See page 3 for details or visit [www.icanthrive.org/event/forrest](https://www.icanthrive.org/event/forrest)

### Bike to the Beach

See page 3 for details or visit [www.icanthrive.org/event/bike](https://www.icanthrive.org/event/bike)

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### Upcoming events at

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## Message From Sean

Fourteen months ago, I started my journey as Thrive CEO. I had the humbling opportunity to watch Thrive staff in crisis mode – ensuring that our Thrivers received the exceptional quality of care that we expect. Now, after arguably the most difficult year of our lifetimes, I am incredibly hopeful and excited for what the coming year will bring.

The events of the past year, including the pandemic, personal losses, healthcare crises, social injustice and unrest, and financial insecurity, to name a few, have left scars. But these scars only made us stronger and even more dedicated to our work by underscoring societal issues that directly link to our mission. They showed us that we could rise up, learn from difficult situations, and love and care about each other even more. We can finally, with joy, look to the future.

At Thrive, we welcome change and the growth that the coming year will bring. In the spirit of this future thinking, I am happy to announce that the organization has brought on our first Chief Operating Officer (COO), Stacey Forrest. Stacey brings a wealth of experience in all facets of human services, and she will oversee the operational aspects of Thrive. This year's challenges have taught us the importance of a cohesive organization, and Stacey's skills will enhance what we currently have in place and help us expand where we need to go. Please join me in welcoming Stacey to Thrive!

We are also moving forward on a host of other fronts. Thrive has introduced a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program, designed to ensure that staff are sensitive to the needs of all participants, families, and fellow employees. On the in-person programming front, we are currently examining how to reintroduce activities safely. Creating a safe and inclusive plan is extensive, so we appreciate your patience as we work through this process. We also continue to expand programming for Worcester participants and families, with more to come on that subject.

As we forge ahead, we continue to be moved by the resiliency of our participants, families, and staff. This newsletter includes stories that will inspire you in many ways. I hope you enjoy what we have to share.

Warm regards,

Sean Rose, President & CEO



## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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

### Love of Sports Brought Thriver to WooSox

Meet the newest member of the WooSox Stadium Crew, Alexis Sokoloff. A Thrive participant for more than five years, Alexis just landed her dream job as an usher for the Worcester Red Sox, the professional minor league baseball team that just moved to the city. As an avid sports fan, this job is a perfect fit.

"I love all sports, and I especially love to follow the Boston teams – Celtics, Patriots, Red Sox, and Bruins," Alexis excitedly shared. When she heard the WooSox were moving to town, Alexis jumped into action. With the help of her job coach, she applied, interviewed, and earned a coveted position with the team. As a stadium usher, Alexis guides people to their seats and answers visitors' questions. "I love my job especially talking to and helping the fans," she added.

This job is not Alexis' first experience with a professional sports team. In the 2019-2020 hockey season, she in-

terned for the Worcester Railers, a local minor league hockey team, where she worked with fans and assisted with the youth learn-to-skate program. The skills she learned through this experience, helped her to move-on to her current position. "At the Railers, I learned to feel comfortable interacting with people and how important it is to make eye contact - skills I use at my new job," Alexis shared.

As a graduate of Thrive's LEAD (Leadership Experience And Development) initiative, Alexis also learned these techniques years ago as a participant in the program. What began as a desire to meet new friends became an education in self-advocacy and confidence building. "The skills taught in LEAD are designed to carry over into all aspects of a graduate's life. It's always exciting to see the LEADers take what they've learned and use it in real-life situations. We are so proud of Alexis," shared Caitlin Devaney-Fortwengler, LEAD Program Director.

Alexis is taking one day at a time, en-



*Alexis Sokoloff in her uniform working at a WooSox game.*

joying her new position, and looking forward to continuing work and exercising her independence. "I love my job, and I know I can do anything I put my mind to," she confidently shared. Congratulations, Alexis - the WooSox are so lucky to have you! ■

## FAMILIES FOCUS

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

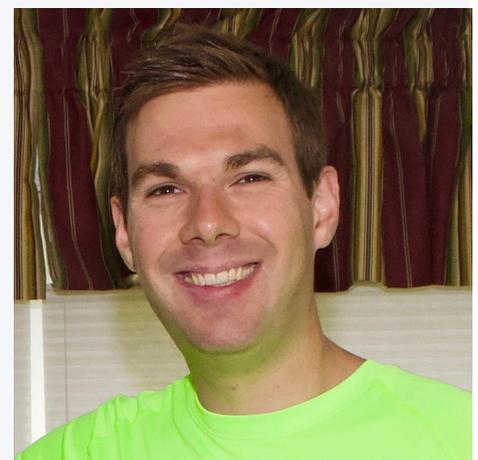
### Natural Leader Steps Up

It is said that "leadership is an action, not a position." When Chris Dunn joined Thrive Support & Advocacy's Virtual Adult Men's Group, he was just looking to get together with a group of guys and have "dude" talk. Little did he know that it would become something much more. Through his concern for helping others, he instinctively stepped up as a leader in the group and exemplified what it means to be a Thriver.

At their first meeting, Chris noticed that some of the participants had trouble connecting with others.

"Chris jumped right in and started asking questions attempting to get everyone involved," shared Mike Diggins, Thrive's Director of Family Support. From there, Chris' commitment to the guys took off.

"I know who is interested in what topics, and I try to make sure we cover those topics so everyone feels connected. If I notice that one of the guys is not participating, I try to direct the conversation toward something that interests them, so they become involved," Chris caringly shared. "Some people with disabilities have trouble being socially comfortable or asking questions. I love to talk, so I



*Thriver and Group Leader Chris Dunn.*

feel like it is my responsibility to help them come out of their shell," he added.

This group is not Chris' only experience with being a leader. He is a

*Natural Leader continued on page 4*

## COMMUNITY LIVING

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

# Thrive Resident Has Real-life Guardian Angel

In the ten years since Marilyn Barrish moved into a Thrive Support & Advocacy community residence, she often spoke lovingly about her parents. Growing up as an only child, Marilyn and her parents had an extremely close relationship. Marilyn spent many years knowing that her parents had passed away but not being able to remember where they were buried, which often made her very sad.

On a mission to ease her sadness, Jim Fairbanks, Thrive Residential Program Director, was determined to find Marilyn's parents. "Through casual conversation, I knew how important this was to her and that she wanted to be with them when she went to her final resting place," recalled Fairbanks. After a year of research, Fairbanks located the Barrishes at a cemetery in Sharon, MA. Unbeknownst to anyone, they had purchased a plot for Marilyn's burial, but unfortunately, there were unpaid expenses of more than \$5,000 associated with bringing their final wish to reality.

Over the next three years, Fairbanks worked the phones and his connections to find funding for Marilyn's cause. "Many organizations wanted to help, but it was just not in the scope of their offerings," shared Fairbanks. After more than a hundred phone calls, two local organizations, Yad Chessed and Jewish Family Services of Metrowest, heard Marilyn's story and committed to helping. They worked together and donated almost the entire sum for the cost of her burial. After years of hard work and determination, Fairbanks finally found real-life guardian angels for Marilyn.

This fall, thanks to their donations, Marilyn's burial plan was finalized. "I feel such a sense of relief knowing that Marilyn will be reunited with her family in the end," said Fairbanks. Although she doesn't fully understand what happened, Marilyn finds happiness knowing where her parents are buried. "This process has been especially emotional because I knew how important it was to Marilyn. Our residents are like family. I love them dearly and would



*Thrive resident Marilyn Barrish (left) with Residential Program Director Jim Fairbanks.*

do anything for them. If there is one thing I learned from all of this, it is to never give up," Fairbanks shared. This story, particularly Jim Fairbanks, is a shining example of the above and beyond philosophy at Thrive. ■

## OTHER NEWS

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

### CELEBRATING LEAD GRADUATES

Congratulations to the 2020-2021 LEAD graduates: Alexander Bowler, Liam Clinton, Jason Dore, Melissa Qualey, Giles Rae, Alexis Sokoloff, and Bryna St. Pierre. On June 28 we will celebrate these LEADers with a special graduation ceremony. Meeting virtually all year, this group exemplified what it takes to be leaders by working on many of their skills independently. We are excited to see them put their skills into practice by becoming leaders in their communi-



ties. Let's give a big round of applause for our LEADers!

### FORREST MEMORIAL ROAD RACE IS BACK AND IN-PERSON

We're incredibly excited to be back in-person for the Forrest Memorial Road Race on Sunday, Sept. 26, 2021 at Wayside Athletic Club. Stay tuned for more information on how to register or volunteer. If your company is interested in sponsoring the race visit our website at [www.icanthrive.org/event/forrest](http://www.icanthrive.org/event/forrest) to learn more. We hope you can join us for this inclusive fun-filled event!

### THRIVE IS PARTNERING WITH BIKE TO THE BEACH & WE NEED YOU!

Thrive is recruiting riders for our Thrive Spinners bike team to take part in the Bike to the Beach NE ride on Sat., Sept. 18, 2021. Riders choose the distance they want - 100, 50, or 25 miles. All funds raised by our champion riders will go directly to Thrive. Team members will receive a welcome pack, weekly tips & training supports, Thrive swag, and a team bike shirt. For more information go to [www.icanthrive.org/event/bike](http://www.icanthrive.org/event/bike) or email [lmarcoulier@icanthrive.org](mailto:lmarcoulier@icanthrive.org). ■

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

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

# Thrive Ski Team Overcomes Challenges

Flashback to March 2020, when the world shut down just days before Thrive's Alpine Ski Team was set to hit the slopes for the 2020 Championship Competition. After a year to think about what they had missed, Thrive skiers were eager to head to the mountain in 2021 to prove what they couldn't in 2020 - that they are champions!

Every Monday from January through mid-March, twelve athletes and ten coaches headed to Ski Ward to strap on their skis. Adhering to COVID safety protocols – wearing masks, suiting up in your car, and riding chairlifts only with family members - proved to be a significant adjustment but not a deterrent. With a focus on creating a positive experience



Thrive skier celebrating his race.



The Thrive Alpine Ski Team catching some down time before heading up the hill to race.

rather than singularly concentrating on fine-tuning skills, Thrive coaches and Ski Ward Race Team partners headed out every week with dedication. "This was a huge commitment for family members, athletes, and coaches, but everyone's enthusiasm was contagious," shared Head Coach Deb Roberts.

Months of hard work culminated on a winter day in March at Berkshire East in Charlemont, MA, at the Special Olympics MA Alpine Ski Championships. Because this was a new venue for the athletes it was a bit challenging to navigate, but Thrive skiers faced these difficulties head-on. With few onlookers due to COVID restrictions, the group hit the slopes not to set records or win medals but to prove that they have what

it takes to be champions – grit, and determination. And that they did. Every team member finished the day with a sense of accomplishment and pride for making it through a demanding season. These twelve athletes and their coaches are a true testament to what it means to be Thrive Strong!

Looking ahead to next year, the team has a renewed focus on fine-tuning race skills and having fun. "We'd love to expand our partnership with the Ski Ward Race Team after benefiting so much from their knowledge and kindness of racers Elizabeth and Lia and their coach Chris. Our athletes loved training and skiing with them. We are so appreciative that they volunteered their time," shared Roberts. "With the season now in the record books, what stands out most to me is the pure elation everyone felt on that first day of practice and throughout the season. Like many, the previous months had taken a toll, and we were so happy to see each other and be together! That is what being a team is all about!" she added.

*Side Note: After more than a decade, as Head Coach of Thrive's Alpine Ski Team Dave Domke stepped aside this year. We would like to thank him for his many years of dedicated service to the athletes and the organization. ■*

## Natural Leader

recent graduate of the Waypoint Adventures Leadership-in-Training program, which teaches leadership skills through outdoor adventure. Chris is using what he learned to make changes in his own life. Like many, the pandemic has created an opportunity for him to live a healthier lifestyle by exercising regularly, eating right, and getting plenty of sleep. Also, he recently accomplished a long-term goal of moving out of his parents' home to a shared living

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situation, all while working as a janitor for a local collaborative.

"I can't say enough about Chris' compassion, attitude, and desire to help," said Mike. "The fact that the guys are excited to come back every week and are encouraging their friends to join the group demonstrates the impact that Chris' leadership has had on these guys." Thank you to Chris for bringing your love of helping others to Thrive and making a real difference in people's lives. ■