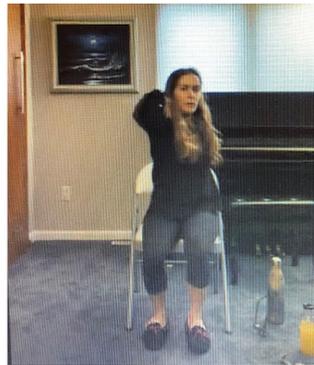


OP NEWS

The Opportunity Project Newsletter • 2020-2021



A Clubhouse Program Empowering People with Brain Injury

**THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT,
 RESILIENCE AND KINDNESS...
 WE ARE SUCCEEDING TOGETHER!**

HIGHLIGHTS

How potential meets opportunity:

- ▶ Vocational Unit
- ▶ Nutrition, Health and Wellness
- ▶ Community Integration and Occupational Therapy Units
- ▶ Brain Injury Awareness Month 2020

Message from the Chairman

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Marc E. Berson, Esq.
Chairman

Opportunity Project is celebrating our 26th year of providing programs and services to people with brain injury. In 1994, our founding year, we had initiated a one-day-per-week program. Today, we remain the first and only free-standing Clubhouse program in New Jersey. Over this past year, along with most other organizations, we have faced uncharted territory and through it all, our mission remains stronger than ever. We stand strong!

We continue to be excited about our partnership with RWJBarnabas Health – Children's Specialized Hospital as this very exciting integration of programs and services continues to offer Opportunity Project many unique resources, the benefit of research and human resources support along with many other areas of expansion.

During the current COVID-19 situation, we seamlessly transitioned our programs and services to virtual, remote platforms. In addition to our daytime schedule and thanks to our very creative and flexible group of Members and professionals, Opportunity Project has added both evening and weekend groups to the repertoire, offering Members more flexibility and maximum support. We are so thrilled that our programs and services have continued to expand despite the challenges we are facing and know that our Members need the structure and connections more than ever.

As you review this newsletter you will see photos and read comments from our Members who are succeeding in all areas: vocational, nutrition, community integration, occupational therapy and so much more. We are proud of our many community partners without whom we could not assist our Members in creating a new life for themselves – one that is meaningful and fulfilling.

Our annual brain injury awareness events and fundraising activities continue to be a critical part of the Clubhouse's efforts. Our 2019 Annual Golf Classic raised \$266,000 and Brain Injury Awareness Month events continue to grow focusing on community and corporate brain injury awareness.

The Clubhouse has served hundreds of adults with brain injury and the demand for these services continues to grow. Membership is lifelong and our doors are always open. Even with diminished government funding, no member is ever denied services due to lack of financial resources.

It is only with your support that we are able to provide the much needed programs and services to those living with brain injury!

We look forward to the future with anticipation and thank you for all that you do for Opportunity Project.

Marc E. Berson
Chairman



*Opportunity Project Founders:
Marc E. Berson, Rita Yohalem and Lisa Goldman*

Letter from the Executive Director



Rebecca Gallanter, MSW, LSW
Executive Director

I am honored to serve as Executive Director of Opportunity Project, an organization which is a pioneer in the brain injury field. We offer stellar programs and services, a universally accessible state-of-the-art facility and dedicated, highly qualified staff. Opportunity Project has transitioned in many ways over the past year, including forming an exciting partnership with RWJBarnabas Health – Children’s Specialized Hospital. We are proud to provide survivors of brain injury with opportunities to build cognitive skills, vocational skills, self-esteem and confidence in their ability to accomplish productive activities and to lead fulfilling lives - and continue to do so throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Within days of the physical closing of the Clubhouse building, our creative group of Members and professionals worked together to continue our full array of programs and services remotely, along with additional offerings, both during our usual daytime schedule plus evening/weekend hours. Specialty staff, including a yoga instructor and music therapist, were integrated as well. Our Members initiated a technology support team, to guide and support those in need of assistance accessing services virtually. New Members who may not have been able to attend in person due to distance or other barriers have been welcomed to the Clubhouse. These are only some of the ways that Opportunity Project has contributed to the ongoing progress and well-being of individuals and families living with brain injury, despite the challenges faced in the outside world. Members are our priority and we strive to customize services according to each person’s individual needs, regardless of the circumstances!

Our Members, staff, volunteers and Board Members are incredibly committed to Opportunity Project. It is a pleasure to be working with so many welcoming, dedicated people within the immediate area and throughout the state and to strengthen our relationships with many businesses, agencies and professionals. We are very grateful to our many supporters and proud to receive funding for major initiatives from the Kessler Foundation, Merck Foundation, County of Essex, Hyde and Watson Foundation, Smart Family Foundation, Investors Bank Foundation, Provident Bank Foundation, The Wawa Foundation and the Small Business Administration. We thank our many community partners who host Blue Jean Days, dedicate funds toward our organization and remember us via tributes throughout the year.

I am so proud that our CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) certification resulted in a perfect rating (“no recommendations”). This goal is achieved by only 3% of accredited organizations, which is a testament to the quality of programs and services offered by Opportunity Project.

Please “like” and “follow” us on social media so that you are apprised of the latest developments. We look forward to providing you with a member-led tour of our beautiful location, once our building is reopened!

If we have not yet connected in person, I look forward to meeting you very soon. Thank you for your ongoing support of Opportunity Project.....without YOU, all of this would not be possible!

Rebecca Gallanter, MSW, LSW
Executive Director

About the Clubhouse

Recovery from brain injury is a lifelong process. OP’s Clubhouse Program provides a peer-driven supportive environment for people with brain injury who are seeking the next step in their journey to recovery. We offer challenges, experiences and encouragement through a work-ordered day to assist our Members in adjusting to and creating “a new normal.” **Our program is divided into units which incorporate all operations and activities.**

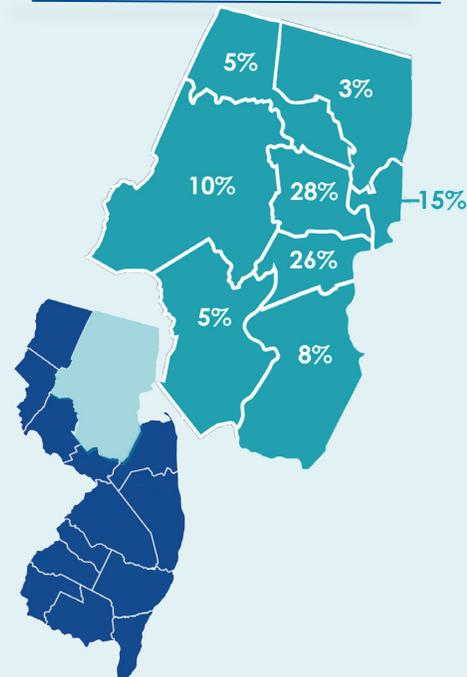
- **Cognitive and Community Integration Unit:** Activities and training in cognitive skills, community resources and socialization.
- **Nutrition Unit:** Builds a culture of health through education, healthy cooking, fitness and community partnerships.
- **Occupational Therapy Unit:** Focuses on maximizing independence with every day tasks.
- **Social Work Unit:** Assists with funding, housing, self-advocacy and other life issues.
- **Vocational Unit:** Work evaluation, training, and job coaching.

LEADING CAUSES OF BRAIN INJURY FOR OP MEMBERS



Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is an alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by an external force. Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is an injury to the brain that has occurred after birth. Examples include stroke, aneurysm and tumor.

OP MEMBERS LIVE IN THESE NEW JERSEY COUNTIES



Over 1.7 million Americans sustain a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) each year and more than 5 million Americans live with the after-effects of brain injury. Effects of TBI can include impaired thinking or memory, movement, sensation (e.g., vision or hearing), or emotional functioning (e.g., personality changes, depression). These issues can have lasting effects on individuals, families and communities.

OP Program Spotlight: Vocational Unit

Thanks to you, we continue to innovate and provide maximum support to our Members as they successfully navigate vocational challenges, obtain paid employment and maintain high job retention rates!

The OP vocational program ensures vocational success for Members by helping them build job-readiness skills at the Clubhouse and at off-site volunteer opportunities, ultimately resulting in paid employment positions.

Recently the Vocational Unit developed an innovative NextGen program for brain injured young adults. NextGen Members engage in various tasks in a simulated office space such as selecting appropriate attire, planning purchases, organizing and managing a budget. This life skills based program has drastically increased Members' engagement, confidence, and productivity and continues to prepare Members for workplace success.

Amidst this global health crisis, we have also begun an exciting collaboration with our partners at Children's Specialized Hospital and RWJBarnabas Health that will capitalize on Opportunity Project's unique vocational expertise and on the hospital system's resources. We are formalizing Opportunity Project's proven vocational program model so that best practices can be implemented for all people with disabilities served by the RWJBarnabas healthcare system.



Gary, RWJBarnabas Health, Pathology Clerk
"I'm personable and task-oriented and this job involves welcoming patients, filing and organizing tasks which is a great fit for me. Thank you to RWJBarnabas Health and OP!"



Bill, WAE Center, Digital Facilitator
"I develop the art curriculum for adults with disabilities plus I teach classes on art and growing and sustaining plants and produce. Recently, I'm also providing tech support."



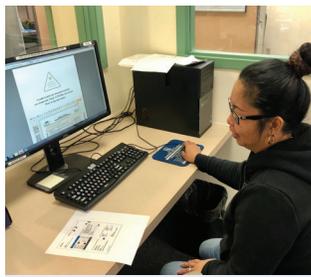
Michael J., Meals on Wheels Volunteer
"I've been working hard on improving the use of my affected side with OP's Occupational Therapist. I enjoy delivering meals to those in need. My favorite part is making people smile! "



Joseph, Steven & Marlon, OP's NextGen Members
"We're practicing communicating effectively in the workplace by playing Jenga."



Davante, OP's NextGen Member
"I'm getting my work attire ready."



Abigail, OP's NextGen Member
"I'm practicing office skills in preparation for paid employment."

We honor our partners for National Disability Employment Month



Members review job skills that employers require. Special thanks to The Essex County Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for your support!

Thank you to our employment and volunteer partners for your support!

Current Partners

Carpet House
Children's Specialized Hospital
Home Depot
La Strada Nuova Millburn
LearningRx Millburn
Millburn Free Public Library
Montclair Art Museum
New Eyes for the Needy
Reeves Reed Arboretum
RWJBarnabas Health
Rock 'n' Joe of Millburn
Sage Eldercare
The Beth Greenhouse, Newark
Beth Israel Medical Center
WAE Center
Walgreens
Whole Foods

Thank you to the Kessler Foundation for the grant in support of OP's NextGen program – new to our Vocational Unit!

Nutrition, Health & Wellness

Research shows that nutrition plays a vital role in improving the outcome of traumatic brain injury in adults. The OP Nutrition Unit is committed to improving the health, wellness and quality of life for our Members. We build a culture of health by incorporating our health and safety values into all aspects of our programs. The Nutrition Unit offers individualized nutrition counseling, healthy cooking classes, grocery shopping training, modified fitness classes and nutrition education classes.

We continue to provide our Members with maximum support including assistance with navigating the ongoing safety and wellness issues throughout the pandemic. Members remain actively engaged in our programs and are thankful for the essential services OP continues to provide to assist them in achieving their nutrition and wellness goals.



John loves making delicious homemade soups!



Members attend weekly health and wellness groups with a Registered Dietitian at Newark Beth Israel Hospital's Wellness Center.



Michael helped cook sweet potato and black bean burgers.

Thank you to the Merck Foundation for the grant in support of OP's Nutrition and Wellness Program.

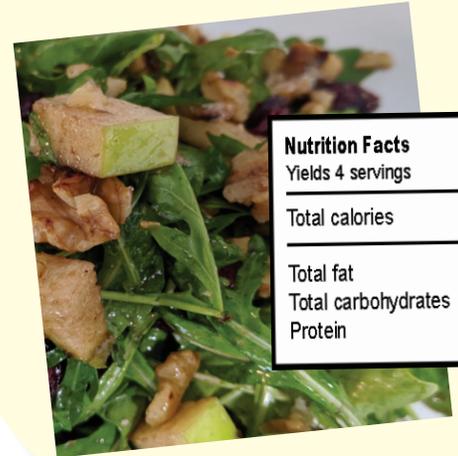
Arugula Salad

Ingredients:

- 4 C Arugula
- 1 Granny Smith Apple, large diced
- ¼ C Dried Cranberries
- ¼ C Walnuts, toasted and chopped
- 1/8 C Goat Cheese
- ½ Red Onion, sliced thin
- 2 TBL Olive Oil
- 1 TBL Balsamic Vinegar
- Salt and Pepper to taste

Method of Preparation:

1. Toast the walnuts in a sauté pan. Roughly 4 to 6 minutes until they start to brown. Rough chop and add to bowl with other ingredients.
2. Add olive oil, balsamic vinegar and salt and pepper to taste.



Nutrition Facts	
Yields 4 servings	
Total calories	270
Total fat	19g
Total carbohydrates	23g
Protein	7g

Community Integration and Occupational Therapy Units

Recovery from brain injury is a lifelong process. The Community Integration and Occupational Therapy Units provide support for recovery by assisting our Members in developing socialization skills, cultivating meaningful connections and promoting health and wellness. The Occupational Therapy Unit focuses on assisting our Members in utilizing compensatory strategies, adapting the environment and modifying tasks through interactive therapy.

OP Counselors are helping Members achieve their goals of feeling mentally positive and confident, improving performance of daily activities, and maximizing independence. These are vital components for recovery and reintegration back into life after a brain injury.



I worked diligently with OP's OT and now I can do valued activities such as grooming and meal preparation with my affected hand. Thanks OP!

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS	
Call someone. Let them know you care	Go outside and feed the birds
Leave food supplies at someone's door	Check in on family and friends
Share and donate items to charities	Write a song or poem
Post positive and inspirational quotes	Draw/paint a picture for a gift
Play or sing a song to someone	Share your knowledge and sense of humor
Send links of a songs to a friend	Make a list of: Television shows and movies and share
Make online activity packets for children, friends and family members	Volunteer to listen to people who need support and socialization
Share online game invites: CandyCrush, Junes Journey, words with friends, WordRelax	Swap and share recipes
Share online brain game and fun activities apps and sites	Make someone an art craft
Share informational self-help resources	Share fun photos and memories

We reached out to others and provided moments of joy with our Random Acts of Kindness.



Participating in OP's OT groups helps us feel empowered!



We met with the Crisis Intervention Team New Jersey (CITNJ) to raise brain injury awareness and improve mental health crisis response.



We created inspirational pictures and sent them to people in the community that needed some cheering up.

EVENT SPONSORS

- Century 21 Construction
- Fidelity Land Development
- Hollister Construction Services
- Kushner Real Estate Group
- Newark Beth Israel Medical Center
- RWJBarnabas Health
- Sudler Family Foundation
- The David Mandelbaum Family
- The Fidelco Group
- The Freidus Family

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- Investors Bank
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- Rutgers University Newark

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- MCJ Amelior Foundation
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- Plafsky Family Foundation
- The Blau & Berg Company



The Golf Classic raises funds that go directly towards



our brain injury programs and awareness activities.



In 2019 we raised over \$266,000!



2020 Brain Injury Awareness Month

Thank you for your help in raising \$35,000 for Brain Injury Awareness Month!

Funds go directly towards our brain injury programs and prevention.

Brain Injury Awareness Month launched with Millburn Mayor Jackie Benjamin Lieberberg's visit to the Clubhouse to present the proclamation declaring March 2020 Brain Injury Awareness Month in Millburn. OP Members visited the Millburn Free Public Library and set up a table to share their brain injury stories and provide prevention information to the community. We also greeted supporters for an OP fundraiser at Chipotle Mexican Grill and enjoyed burritos to benefit brain injury awareness.

We extend our deepest appreciation to our Brain Injury Awareness Month sponsors and supporters for sticking by us in the past and continuing to do so amidst the coronavirus pandemic. Thank you!

We hosted our 6th Annual Healthy Brain, Healthy Me (HBHM) Day

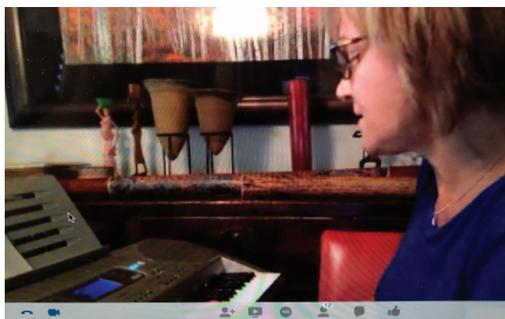
Healthy Brain, Healthy Me Day went virtual and it was a success! Members participated in a productive and fun wellness day of live streaming adaptive yoga and music therapy classes as well as various other fitness, nutrition and wellness activities.



Mayor Jackie Benjamin Lieberberg presented the proclamation.



Thanks Millburn Free Public Library!



We loved the live-streaming music therapy class on HBHM Day!



Thank you Valley Bank!

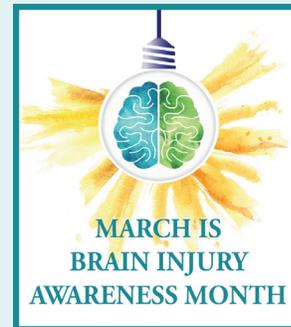


Thank you Investors Bank!



We had a great turnout for the Gosselin Group's Virtual Blue Jean Day!

Thank you to all of our sponsors!



HBHM Day Sponsors

The Fidleco Group
Newark Beth Israel Medical Center

Champion Sponsors

Brach Eichler LLC
Century 21 Construction
Elberon Development Group
Investors Bank
Rutgers University Newark

Ambassador Sponsors

Hunrath, Napolitano, Quigley & Taylor
Valley Bank

Advocate Sponsors

Bruce and Hannah Goldman
Local 68 IUOE

Friend Sponsors

Melissa Wish
Rita Yohalem

Blue Jean Day Sponsors

Children's Specialized Hospital
Lester Schwab Katz & Dwyer
The Gosselin Group at
Prominent Properties
Sotheby's International Realty

To participate in March 2021 Brain Injury Awareness Month email:

jlondon@opportunityproject.org



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Member News

What a year it has been! We're proud of our many accomplishments like maintaining good mental health, being productive and staying connected, especially while home-based. We feel empowered and are thankful for our Opportunity Project peers and counselors.

The Opportunity Project Member Committee (OPMC) meets regularly to advocate for all Members, help manage daily operations of the Clubhouse programs, facilitate fundraisers, and mentor new Members. Recently, we created a Member-run technical support team to maximize Member access to OP's virtual programs. We're gaining new technology skills by using phone-in and video conferencing and participating in social media.

We made new connections including welcoming the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey and hosting BIANJ meetings at the Clubhouse. We created an OP Clubhouse Charity Wish List of essential items for the Clubhouse on Amazon Smile. Please go to <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/BQQYF6BXTNQM> and support us by donating an item. Finally, we participated in various uplifting activities to help build a positive mental outlook.



We strengthen mental health by sharing inspiring messages.



OP's groups keep us connected. We can do this together!



Welcome Tom Grady and BIANJ Members.



Your support has made an everlasting difference.

Please consider a tax-deductible gift by December 31st.

Mail your gift in the enclosed envelope or visit www.opportunityproject.org/donate
jlondon@opportunityproject.org

Thank you!

