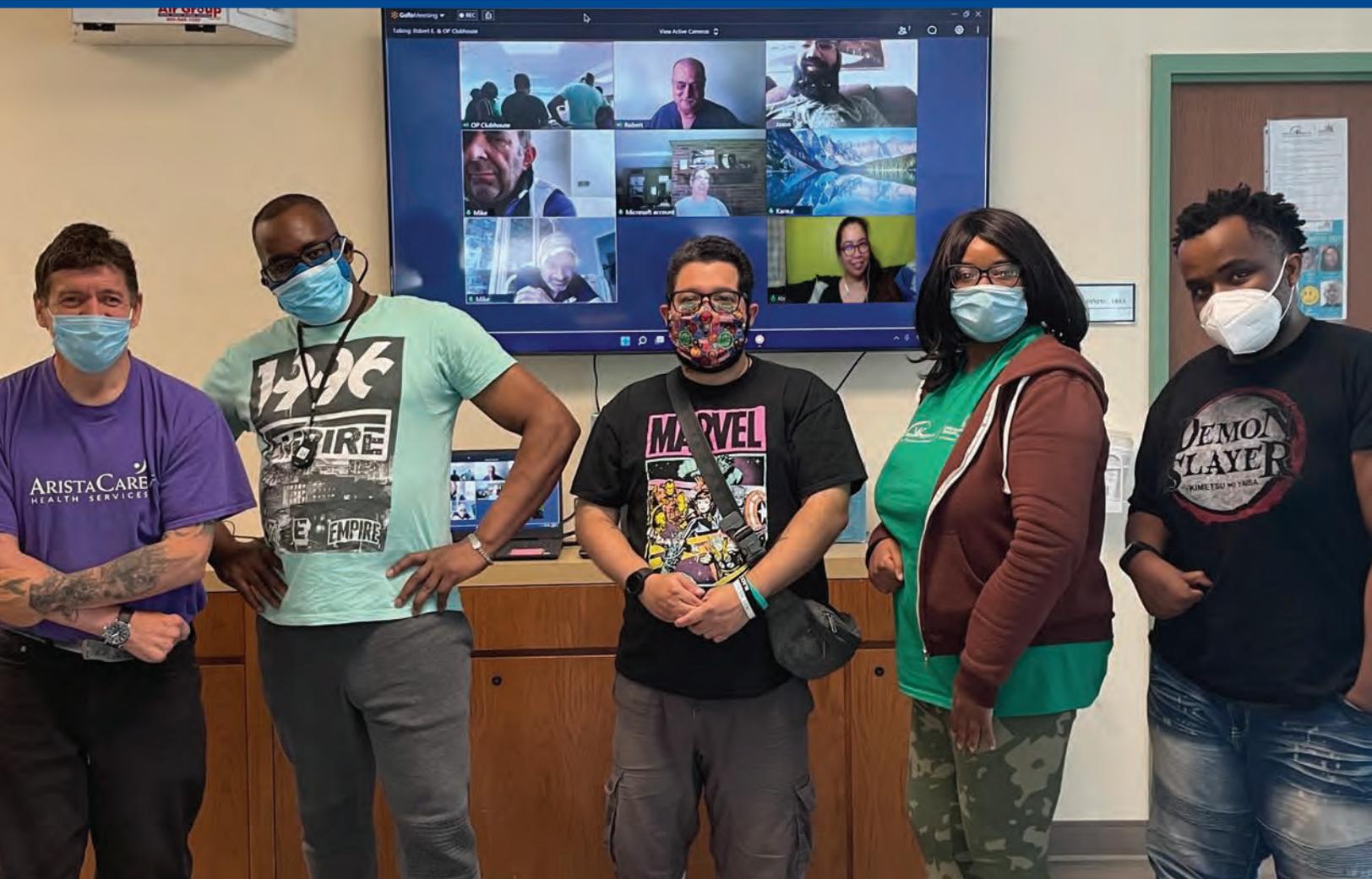


OP NEWS

The Opportunity Project Newsletter • 2022-2023



A Clubhouse Program Empowering People with Brain Injury

**WE CONTINUE TO ACHIEVE
GREAT THINGS BECAUSE OF YOU...
THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

HIGHLIGHTS

How potential meets opportunity:

- ▶ Message from the Chairman
- ▶ Letter from the Executive Director
- ▶ Clubhouse Programs
- ▶ Member News

Message from the Chairman

60 East Willow Street
Millburn, New Jersey 07041
973-921-1000
www.opportunityproject.org

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Oneka Cyrus, BS

Social Worker

Juana Guglielmino, MS, OTR/L

Occupational Therapist

Melissa A. Moyer, MS

Nutrition Counselor

Jacqueline Marino-Rizzi, CBIS

Cognitive &

Community Integration Counselor

Tom Shea, PsyD

Vocational Counselor

Michelle Slepp, MA, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist



Marc E. Berson, Esq.
Chairman

Opportunity Project, which has provided programs and services to people with brain injury for over 28 years, remains the first and only free-standing Clubhouse program in New Jersey. Throughout and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, we have triumphed and continue to stand strong as an organization.

Our partnership with Children's Specialized Hospital and RWJBarnabas Health has now resulted in the development of a revised mission statement, new vision statement and establishment of many organizational goals. We are proud to share that Members, Staff, Trustees and many other stakeholders participated in this wonderful strategic planning process.

As you review OP News, you will see photos and read comments from Members who are succeeding in all areas: vocational, nutrition, cognitive, community integration, occupational therapy, speech and language and so much more. Our programs and services have expanded to include both in-person and virtual platforms so that survivors of brain injury may participate in a hybrid manner and with individualized levels of comfort. We also added a Caregivers' Support Group, meeting monthly and involving so many family members and significant others as we all strive to best support our loved ones with brain injury. Our services which have always included a focus on mental health, have continued to do so as we face ongoing challenging times. We are appreciative 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.

Annual brain injury awareness events and fundraising activities continue to be a critical part of the Clubhouse's efforts. Our 2021 Annual Golf Classic raised over \$267,000 and Brain Injury Awareness Month events continue to grow focusing on community and corporate brain injury awareness.

Opportunity Project has served nearly 700 adults with brain injury and the demand for these services continues to grow. Membership to the Clubhouse 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 continued 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 great 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

To say that I am incredibly proud to serve as Executive Director of this wonderful organization is an understatement. Opportunity Project has consistently been acknowledged as a pioneer in the brain injury field, particularly among the Clubhouses throughout the United States.

This year marks my third and our third as partners with Children's Specialized Hospital / RWJBarnabas Health. It is also one in which Opportunity Project embarked upon the implementation of a strategic plan, in order to continue to achieve maximum mission success. Members, Staff, our Board of Trustees and other stakeholders developed a revised mission statement, new vision statement and a number of goals for the organization.

They include expansion of programming and services, refinement of "hybrid" (both remote and onsite) services for Members and caregivers, collaborative initiatives with the hospital systems, financial goals and so much more.

Opportunity Project's revised Mission Statement: Opportunity Project is a Member-driven organization that enables persons with brain injuries to improve self-esteem, self-determination, personal growth and independence.

Our Vision Statement: Individuals impacted by brain injury are empowered to achieve their full potential.

Opportunity Project will fulfill its mission and achieve its vision through a collaborative partnership among people with brain injury, their families, staff and the community. Truer words cannot be spoken when I reflect upon our daily operations, the professionalism of our staff, dedication of our Members and those who love them. In fact, 100 percent of the caregivers surveyed and 96% of the Members would recommend our organization to someone they know.

We continue to successfully provide opportunities to build cognitive skills, vocational skills, self-esteem and confidence so that adults with brain injury can lead productive and fulfilling lives. Our staff have supported the mental health needs of Members and their families for 28 years, however services have expanded to include a caregiver's support group and various other Member-to-Member mentoring programs, mental health workshops and activities. Our repertoire has expanded to include our own YouTube channel (with over 20 videos so far!) and a technologically state-of-the-art building.

We are very grateful to our many supporters and proud to have received recent funding for major initiatives from the County of Essex, Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, Smart Family Foundation, Investors Bank Foundation, The Wawa Foundation, Dircks Foundation and Fred C. Rummel Foundation. We thank our community partners who sponsor brain injury awareness events, support our fundraising efforts and remember us via tributes.

CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) has certified Opportunity Project with the highest ratings once again in 2021. This is a true testament to the quality of our programs and services.

"Like" and "follow" us on social media to be apprised of the latest developments. Please be in touch to arrange a tour of our beautiful location, we look forward to welcoming you! Thank you for your ongoing support...and for making all of this possible!

Rebecca Gallanter, MSW, LSW
Executive Director

About the Clubhouse

Recovery from brain injury is lifelong. 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 Members in adjusting to and creating "a new normal." **Our program is divided into units, incorporating all operations and activities.**

- **Cognitive and Community Integration Unit:** Activities and training in cognitive skills, mental health, 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.
- **Speech-Language Therapy Unit:** Focuses on facilitating better communication to make meaningful connections.

LEADING CAUSES OF BRAIN INJURY FOR OP MEMBERS

42%	STROKE
31%	MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT
9%	ASSAULT
6%	TUMOR
6%	ANOXIC/HYPOXIC
6%	FALL

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.

5.3 million people in the U.S. live with long-term disabilities as a result 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.

Special thank you to Michael Moran, Program Director and our OP Member Committee for inspiring and leading the program through another great year!

Cognitive & Community Integration

Brain injury often brings about drastic life changes and recovery is life-long. Social support, coping skills, self-care and self-esteem are essential components in building strong emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships and meaningful roles in society after brain injury.

This Unit focuses on building and maintaining meaningful relationships, strengthening cognitive skills and providing mental health support for Members and their families to strengthen resiliency and improve wellness. Group sessions also help to decrease isolation, strengthen communication and creativity while boosting morale, all of which lessen the incidence of mental disorders and stress-related illness.

In addition to our long-standing mental health offerings, **Jacqueline Marino-Rizzi**, Cognitive and Community Integration Skills Counselor, recently spearheaded several new initiatives including: **The Crisis Intervention Team of New Jersey (CITNJ)** collaboration to build brain injury awareness,

the **OP Caregiver Support Group** and the **Reverse Mentorship Program** to share experiences and tips and continue to provide additional critical support for Members and their families. These programs provide necessary resources to help adjust to life's changes throughout brain injury recovery.



Jacqueline educates first responders at The Crisis Intervention Team of New Jersey (CITNJ) on strategies to keep people safe and build rapport and trust between law enforcement and the community.



The Members enjoy group dance at the Clubhouse...it is a great way to de-stress and have fun!

Nutrition, Health & Wellness

Members' wellness is an integral part of the Clubhouse. Failing to meet Recommended Daily Allowances for nutrients important for brain function was not only common among traumatic brain injury survivors but was also associated with decreased mean neurobehavioral scores according to one study published in *Nutritional Neuroscience – An International Journal on Nutrition, Diet and Nervous System*.

At the Clubhouse, Members work together to encourage each other to make healthy decisions related to the eight dimensions of wellness: emotional, physical, occupational, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental and financial. Members participate in a variety of activities including small fitness groups, nutrition and health education classes and healthy cooking classes.

Melissa Moyer, Nutrition Counselor, spearheaded the formation of the new Health and Safety Team. This Member-driven innovative team focuses on health and wellness topics and current trends while offering Members opportunities for direct involvement in OP's policy and procedure development and implementation. Members are the driving force behind the Nutrition Unit as well as all our programs and services. We are proud of the progress and impact OP Members have made on building a culture of health at the Clubhouse, on each other and our staff.

Occupational Therapy

Michael Moran and Juana Guglielmino, Occupational Therapists, help Members focus on utilizing compensatory strategies, adapting the environment, and modifying tasks, in order to maximize independence in daily life. Group and individual occupational therapy provides an opportunity for Members to improve their performance and satisfaction in their daily activities.

Teletherapy allows Occupational Therapy to occur in the Members' natural environments, thus promoting stronger carryover in task performance and satisfaction. In-person services offer an occupation-based, meaningful focus. Members continue to improve their skills in daily routines, including time management, self-regulation, meal preparation, home maintenance and pre-vocational tasks. These are vital components for recovery and community reintegration after a brain injury.



Members participated in a clothing drive in collaboration with Kean University's Occupational Therapy Community Cares Clinic.



The Sensory Oasis was upgraded to mobile sensory carts for more flexibility.



OP was selected to represent brain injury clubhouses at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Conference in San Antonio, Texas.



Members prepare healthy and delicious meals!



Melissa leads an in-person and remote nutrition education group.



It's Fitness Friday at the Clubhouse!

Social Work

The Social Work Unit improves self-advocacy and the overall quality of life for Members by providing counseling sessions and adjustment groups.

Oneka Cyrus, Social Worker, also supports Members and their families with authorizations and intake procedures for enrollment into the Opportunity Project Clubhouse. In addition, assistance is provided in securing various types of funding, housing and other essential community resources.

Group discussions are empowering and uplifting, covering topics such as: the importance of balance, gratitude, correcting unhealthy habits and managing expectations.

Several Members were recently approved for various types of funding including medical, dental, nutritional and assistive technology, plus reduced energy and internet service fees, exemplifying the strength of our crucial Social Work Unit.



Kevin pays reduced fees for energy and internet services, facilitating his participation in OP's hybrid programs!



With Oneka's assistance, Joseph receives funding for all of OP's services and full coverage for medical, vision and dental services!

Speech-Language Therapy

Michelle Slepp, Speech-Language Pathologist, helps Members build connections and self-confidence through focus on improved communication and cognition. Members target the cognitive skills needed for job success, the language skills needed to engage in meaningful conversations and relationships and the speech intelligibility needed to confidently deliver a message. Members have been utilizing their confidence and communication skills by creating videos to share their stories. You can view their inspirational and creative videos by visiting YouTube and searching *Opportunity Project*.

In the Clear Communication Group, Members have insightful discussions about topics related to communication and connection, including self-advocacy, navigating new relationships, active listening, social skills and other helpful topics.

In our new Hot Topic Group, Members enjoy engaging in spirited conversations about current news topics. These discussions target attention and topic maintenance skills, orientation to and awareness of current events, utilization of respectful conversation strategies and much more!



We communicate effectively and build strong connections and self-confidence. Fist bump!

Vocational Unit

The Vocational program continues to support our Members as they make difficult decisions regarding work participation during the pandemic, based on various factors including personal medical history and immune deficiency status. All Members retained their jobs during the health crisis as employers agreed to keep positions on hold until Members were immunized and/or felt safe returning to employment. Despite difficult times, various Members had vocational success including receiving promotions and substantial pay increases. Members also successfully advocated for more demanding and rewarding roles and responsibilities in the workplace.

Under the expert guidance of **Tom Shea, PsyD., Vocational Counselor**, the vocational program was granted a second consecutive "perfect score" by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

The Opportunity Project Clubhouse continues to outperform in the area of Community Integration and Community Employment Services ranking in the top 3% of rehabilitation institutions for delivering "quality standards that enhance the lives of persons served."



Bill's efforts are rewarded with a new role at work!



Our vocational program earns another perfect score from CARF!

Thank you to our employment & volunteer partners:

The Beth Greenhouse
Newark Beth Israel
Medical Center
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Hospital
Home Depot
La Strada Nuova
Millburn
Millburn Free Public
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Montclair Art Museum
New Eyes for the Needy
Rock 'n' Joe of Millburn
RWJBarnabas Health
Sage Eldercare
WAE Center
Walgreens
Whole Foods

If you are interested in becoming an employment or volunteer partner, please contact Tom Shea, PsyD., Vocational Counselor at tshea@opportunityproject.org



2021 Annual Golf Classic

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The Golf Classic raises funds that go directly towards



our brain injury programs and awareness activities.



Despite the Pandemic, in 2021 we raised over \$267,000!



Thank you for your help in raising \$51,000 for
Brain Injury Awareness Month!

Funds go directly towards our brain injury programs and prevention.

Brain Injury Awareness Month launched with Millburn Mayor Maggee Miggins' virtual proclamation presentation declaring March 2022 Brain Injury Awareness Month in Millburn. Opportunity Project then invited community members to a number of enjoyable awareness and fundraising events. We had a great time preparing a delicious meal at our Cooking Class with Chef Danny Arturo, raising awareness in the community with the Jesus Nuñez Love Always collection collaboration and celebrating the art of our very own Members at the J. Nuñez Gallery Art Exhibit Event. Finally, various organizations, supporters and OP Members hosted successful Blue Jean Days and creative fundraisers in support of our brain injury programs!



Mayor Maggee Miggins presented the proclamation.



Thanks to Chef Danny Arturo for a great Cooking Class!



Thanks Member Porfi for hosting your own fundraiser!



Thank you Jesus Nuñez for your collaboration!



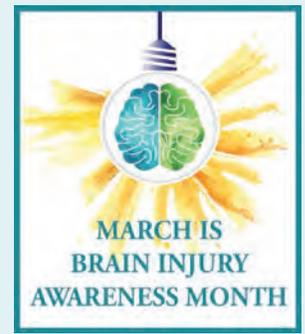
Member Gary is a talented artist!



Member Angel and his beautiful works of art!

To participate in March 2023 Brain Injury Awareness Month
email: jlondon@opportunityproject.org

Thank you
to our sponsors!



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Member Porfi

Thank you to the
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Beth Daugherty, Tracy Lahey
and Julie London



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Visit the Opportunity Project YouTube channel

Member News

Opportunity Project has a YouTube channel! In just one year since its launch, our YouTube channel now features over 20 videos! The creation of these videos help our Members in many ways, from providing productive and meaningful activities, to empowering them to express their thoughts and feelings, and improving executive function skills, such as planning and organization. Topics range from inspirational segments exploring Members' brain injury stories to informative presentations about gardening, fitness and other fun topics. The all-around favorites are the spirited Member and staff educational videos about Brain Injury Awareness Month and Better Speech and Hearing Month.



Chris interviews Member Mike N. on YouTube to get to know him better.

Stay tuned for the latest interview series featuring our talented Members. **View all of our amazing videos on Opportunity Project's YouTube channel.**

The Opportunity Project Member Committee (OPMC) is a strong advocate for Members and all adults with brain injury. Members vote for the candidates of their choice for various OPMC positions. **The OPMC has been instrumental in assisting with the development of OP's new strategic plan** including: proposing strategies for program growth and optimizing collaboration with our partners at Children's Specialized Hospital and RWJBarnabas Health. Members have also provided integral feedback for restructuring the Clubhouse Units to further align the Opportunity Project Clubhouse with the International Brain Injury Clubhouse Alliance (IBICA) standards and preserve the integrity of the Clubhouse model.



Members nominate the 2022 OP Member Committee



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!