

Visions

WINTER 2019

A LOOK AT THE PEOPLE AND PROGRAMS OF OPPORTUNITY MATTERS INC.

Enjoying the Lights and Community

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

Opportunity Matters is fortunate to have a front row seat to Sartell's beautiful Country Lights Festival that occurs nightly each December on the banks of Lake Francis. The Country Lights Festival started in 2017 and continues to grow each year through sponsorships and partnerships with local businesses. This year, 75,000 – 100,000 more lights were added in addition to a 20 x 20 foot warming lodge. Embracing the spirit of the event, Opportunity Matters added numerous lighted trees to our backyard. Additionally, Opportunity Matters' CEO and family volunteered at the warming lodge on the weekend of December 22, passing out hot chocolate and cookies to those taking a stroll through the lights. We look forward to watching this great event grow and will continue to enjoy the beautiful view out our back window. ■



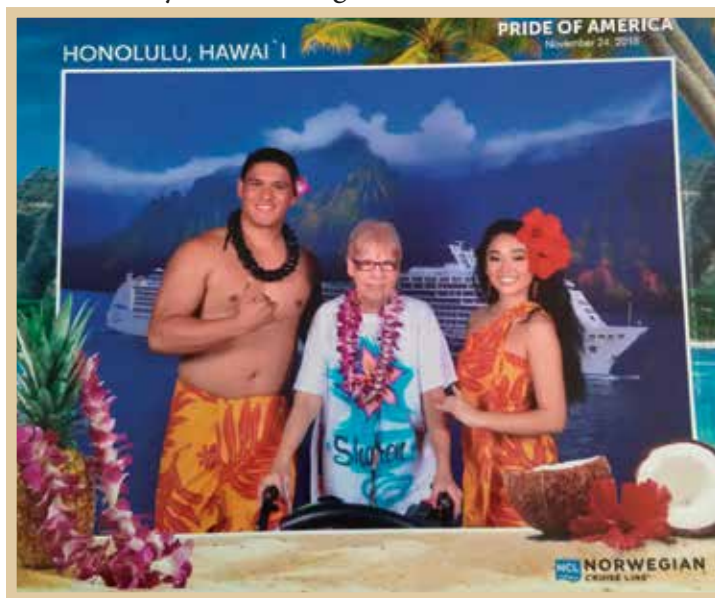
A Tropical Trip

Jess Franks, Program Coordinator

Sharon recently went on a 9 day cruise to Hawaii with Off The Beaten Path and upon her return told staff that “she just didn’t want to come back because it was so beautiful and she had so much fun!” She made several new friends, swam in the pool everyday and saw a different play every night! It’s a lifestyle she could get used too! This is her second trip there and she says it just gets prettier every time!

While on the Cruise they did several craft projects, making real flower lei’s and different jewelry they could wear to the Luau’s they attended. Sharon said her favorite food was Flounder! Her favorite movie was *Blue Hawaii* and play was *Elvis Presley*! Her favorite Island was Kauai because of the pretty water, foliage and beaches!

Since her return, Sharon has been showing her staff and housemates how the Hula girls dance. Sharon laughs and says that she has a plan for how she can live in tropical Hawaii year round. She stated she can live on the ship, eat waffles with banana syrup and whip cream everyday and Hula dance at night! Needless to say, Sharon is looking forward to another cruise next year. ■



Welcome Drew

Amy Buermann, Program Director

Drew is the new guy at Roosevelt 2, but he's not new to OMI and has attended PTO in the past. He is 20 years old and attends Benton Stearns Voyageurs program in Sauk Rapids. Some of Drew's passions include 80's rock, particularly Whitesnake "Here I go Again," talking about weather, watching it on TV, and watching the sky. He also likes spending time with his family in Sartell – mom, dad, sister Dana, Nana and Papa – and watching Dana's dance shows. Drew is now on his own for the first time and adjusting to roommates. He's always on the move though and enjoys exercising, eating at Dairy Queen, McDonald's or Burger King, and having ice cream after his meal. Stop by and say "hi" sometime! ■



Meet Stephanie

Kaitlyn Fleck, Program Coordinator

Stephanie moved into Opportunity Matters' Foster 5 in September and is busy getting to know her new housemates and spending time doing one of her many hobbies. Stephanie enjoys getting her hair and nails done, visiting the animals at the Humane Society, and going to the YMCA and public library. She is also very creative and enjoys arts and crafts, coloring and helping staff with cooking and baking. Stephanie highly values the time she spends with her family and friends, including her many nieces and nephews! In addition, she also attends Opportunity Matters' Pathway to Opportunities day program. If you happen to catch this busy lady make sure to take a moment to say hello! ■

Welcome Robert

Amanda Niemeyer, Program Director

If word finds and westerns are your thing, we invite you to come meet the newest individual at Foster 7! Robert moved from his apartment to join Foster 7 at the end of September and has been enjoying socializing and doing fun activities with his housemates as he gets settled in. Robert is fortunate to have family that visits often, and spends any additional free time watching westerns on TV, playing cards, completing word finds and cheering on the Vikings! Robert likes to stay active in his community by going for walks and dining frequently at his favorite restaurants; Jimmy's Pour House and Perkins. Robert is currently working at Whitney Senior Center four days a week but is hoping to retire soon and start attending OMI's PTO program. ■

A Little Extra Help

Drea Metcalf, Program Manager

George came to us after hearing about the services we provide to another individual in his apartment complex. He is his own guardian and picked his own goals and staffing hours. George was already in an apartment before he started receiving services, so we didn't have to assist in finding him an apartment. Currently, he receives six hours of staff support each week. His goal is to continue to increase his independence and reduce his staffing support hours to only four hours per week in the near future. OMI staff help George with basic independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting. They also work with him on impulse control and working through all the details of a new project, plan or idea. George is currently looking for a job so he can get a new vehicle and start driving himself around again. Until then, he uses the Metro bus to get himself where he needs to go. Since George is so motivated, we think that he will meet his goal to reduce staff hours very soon.

Like George, sometimes individuals only need a little help to be successful in their daily living activities. OMI's supported apartment program can provide a wide range of services and support to help individuals move forward and meet their goals. ■



Our Annual Holiday Party

Thank you to everyone who attended!



Check out more photos on our website or on our Facebook page!

Our Annual Halloween Party



Best Costume Winners!

Finding the Right People

Jennie Sutcliffe, Recruiter/Trainer

As a service organization, Opportunity Matters allocates nearly 80% of its annual operating budget to employee payroll. Our employees are the backbone of the organization and hiring those dedicated to the mission of the organization is essential for continued success.

Over the past year, since OMI added a Recruiter/Trainer we have tried many different things to bring in new staff and retain them. With the low unemployment rate and multitude of jobs in the area, OMI has to be creative and assertive to find good employees who want to be part of our team. We've tried things such as SCSU speaking engagements to potential candidates and flyers throughout the surrounding area. We have also been looking into different marketing techniques through local companies such as Leighton Broadcasting, many local newspapers and even Marcus Parkwood Cinema. Although some of these options are out of our price range, they are good ideas to keep looking into for future options. Currently, our greatest recruiting success has come from Indeed.com and word of mouth from our employees and friends who know and understand what OMI does. Opportunity Matters provides all initial and ongoing training needed to be successful in their positions, while the ideal candidate should bring the motivation to do a great job, an openness to learning and a compassion for making an impact in the lives of the individuals we serve.

Help us spread the word about job opportunities to your family, friends and neighbors! ■

An Impactful Year

Brenda Eggerth, Volunteer & Communications Manager

2018 saw another successful year in Opportunity Matters' community involvement program. Each year, Opportunity Matters' supervisors and managers make an impact by volunteering at local organizations. In 2018, staff were able to pick from nine different organizations to volunteer, allowing flexibility to accommodate their busy schedules and varying interests. This year's selected organizations included; the Tri County Humane Society, Multiple Sclerosis Walk held in May, the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities Emergency Services, Quiet Oaks Hospice, the Boys and Girls Club, the Salvation Army, Country Manor and the Country Lights Festival on Lake Francis. Combined, staff contributed over 90 hours and greatly enjoyed their time learning about different organizations and essential programs operating throughout central MN. ■



Autism Supports, Strategies and Resources Workshop

Sam Pierskalla, Program Services Director

On Friday October 26th, Opportunity Matters had the pleasure to team up with the Autism Society of MN, Wacosa, and Arc of Mid-state Minnesota to put on a workshop about autism. The workshop was established to provide outreach to greater Minnesota and to provide training to parents, caregivers, support professionals and individuals with autism. The workshop covered topics such as; what is autism, positive behavior supports, executive functions of autism /emotional regulations and de-escalation strategies, strategies for autism and challenging behaviors, self advocacy and life planning. Around 100 people attended the workshop which included; parents, individuals with autism, teachers, social workers, emergency personnel and professional caregivers. The workshop was interactive, educational and executed in a very professional manner. Due to the positive feedback from those who attended, the Autism Society will be offering another workshop in the fall of 2019 which Opportunity Matters will be involved with again. ■

Remembering Steve

Andrea Wesenberg, Program Manager

The first time Steve visited Roosevelt 2 he came strolling in with his cowboy hat, Western shirt and cowboy boots on. He'd had hip surgery a few months before this, but wasn't letting that stop him from looking good in his cowboy attire. He occasionally played the guitar and sang beautifully. Steve really enjoyed going to camp the 1st year he was at Roosevelt 2. He'd never done anything like that before, and the smile on his face in the pictures says it all. Steve loved to listen to music - all different types but country western was his favorite and it helped take him to a place in his mind to relax. Steve grew up on a farm outside of Long Prairie, MN with his brother and three sisters. Steve loved to talk about the "good ole days" of baling hay and working long hours. He had a Plymouth Barracuda that he bought directly from the factory that he loved to reminisce about. Steve went to college for a short time at St. Cloud State and joined the army. It was great to listen to him talk about his past and see how happy it made him. We miss those stories but know Steve is in a better place and truly happy. Thanks for the memories Steve! ■



Remembering Grace

Alison Henry, Program Manager

On August 14, 2018 Grace Becker, 51, passed away at the Lake Ridge Care Center in Buffalo, Minnesota. Grace had been with Opportunity Matters for two years. Grace will be remembered by her housemates and staff for the love she had for her family and her quick wit.

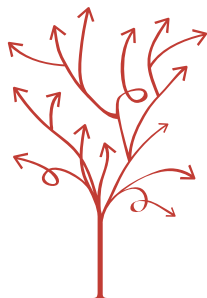
Grace was born in Germany on February 26, 1967. Grace was really proud

of receiving her bachelor's degree from North Arizona University.

Grace enjoyed reading, movies, puzzles, camping, hiking, and shopping (especially when she was buying gifts for her family). Grace had many talents, one being her talent for needle point. She was very creative. A picture Grace painted still remains at Foster 7 today.

Grace was known for her independence, jokes, genuine caring heart for her family and friends and her intelligence. Grace had many quotes, one of her housemate's favorite was, "Don't be a stranger, just be strange!" Grace took pride in looking nice and telling stories about her family.

Grace worked hard to keep her independence and persevered until the end. Grace continued to bring laughter, fun, jokes, and care to those she loved and will be missed. ■



Donations/Grants

We are grateful to the many individuals, families, businesses and foundations whose contributions are vital to the success of Opportunity Matters Inc. The following list reflects gifts received from October 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018.

\$500+

Joyce & Tony Tillemans Fund of the Central MN Community Foundation
Kurt & Sarah Erickson

\$200+

John Skalla
Robyn Gray
Mark Case
Judith & Doug Moe
Nichole Schlichting

\$100+

Mighty Cause Funding
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GL Berg
Jane Peterson Family (in memory of Opal Peterson)
Gerard Stifter
Roger Storkamp

Donations

Carlson Cleaners
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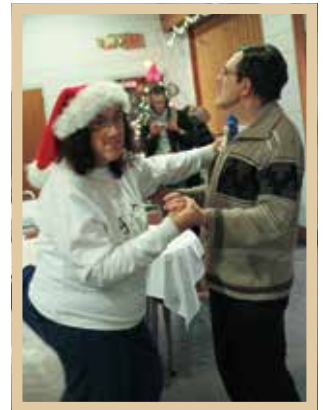
Gary Sabby, *T & S Agency, LLC*

Relationships – New and Old

Brenda Groseclose, Program Director

Long term relationships are beautiful and sweet. Donna, the first individual to move into an Opportunity Matter's home, has been in a relationship with the same man for over 30 years. Every day after work, she hurries through her daily routine, and when she is done, she heads over to his house for the afternoon and evening. Donna and her boyfriend watch TV and movies, talk and eat dinner together every night. Sometimes they eat at his house, sometimes they go out to eat. Although they always have the option for him to come to Donna's home, she prefers the privacy of his apartment. Donna and her boyfriend often come there to the OMI events and it is enjoyable to see them there. Just like any other couple, they at times will have spats, but their love is evident when you see them together.

Donna's relationship with her boyfriend is the most important thing in her life and her team works to support her to maintain her independence in this area.



New relationships are also exciting and fun. Gail, who lives in her own apartment and receives services from our Supported Apartment program, lost her boyfriend of 19 years in 2017. She mourned him, but fortunately, found love again. Gail has been friends with Dan for many years. They started talking and hanging out together more last year at the OMI Halloween party. They started dating shortly after. You may have seen them together at OMI events, dancing, talking, laughing and kissing. The joy you see on their faces when they are together is truly contagious. Whether they are walking at Valleyfair holding hands or with their arms around each other, or just visiting at Gail's apartment, the love they have for each other is obvious. Dan truly lights up when he talks about Gail and her smile is infectious

when she talks about Dan. This summer, they took a trip to Taylor's Falls and had an amazing time together!

New or old, relationships are important in every life. We find fulfillment in providing support to help the individuals we work with enjoy this wonderful part of life. ■