

Opportunities

News and ideas for clients, friends and supporters of Opportunity Partners

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Students blaze trail in Dunwoody program

Opportunity Partners advances pilot

Nine pioneers in Opportunity Partners' pilot training program with Dunwoody College of Technology have earned their first professional cleaning certificates, and are now eager to launch their careers with Opportunity Partners' help.

Each participant earned six different certificates, ranging from Safety Basics to Restroom Services, completed a work-readiness module to polish their resumes, and are now ready to begin their job search.

The certificates – signed jointly by Opportunity Partners and Dunwoody – represent a five-week Professional Cleaning training program and are a significant step toward Opportunity Partners' vision of offering expanded training programs on multiple career tracks for people with disabilities.

"Teaching this group of super stars and trailblazers has been awesome and exciting," said Carol Glazer, Opportunity Partners' Certified Learning Platform Training Instructor. "Success did not always come easily, but these students displayed perseverance and a true love of learning that every teacher in the world hopes for."

"The experience was moving for clients, too. "I liked taking this class," said Robert Johnson. "I did a good job taking this class."

Service Planner Jenn Allen said David L. Nelson was emotional when he learned he was chosen to take part in the program. "He is so excited to complete the classes and is looking forward to independent placement," she said.

"I feel really great," David said. "My goal once I complete the program is to find a job. I know some of these jobs will pay a decent amount."

Student Carrie O'Brien, who heard about the program and was eager to sign up, described the training as a "really positive experience."



Carrie O'Brien

Although Carrie eventually hopes for a career doing secretarial work or cosmetology, she views the professional cleaning training as an excellent foundation. "I think it's a good thing to start out with," she said. "I'm getting to learn different types of skills."

Building on the pilot's success, Opportunity Partners will now expand it to Bloomington Public Schools (Independent School District 271). Starting this fall, students in Bloomington's special education programs will be able to take part in the five-week training program at an Opportunity Partners location in Bloomington.



Four of the students participating in Opportunity Partners' new pilot program with Dunwoody College of Technology were awarded their first training certificates at a ceremony in summer 2010. From left, Doug Vevea, Robert Johnson, David L. Nelson and Michelle Alvord.

Mailroom worker joins the ranks of General Mills



Katie Worrell recently joined an Opportunity Partners team working in the General Mills mailroom.

By Jamie Christianson

Independent. A great worker. The go-to person. These are just a sampling of words used to describe Katie Worrell's work ethic by those who have been privileged to work with her. An Opportunity Partners mailroom worker since 2008, Katie's hard-working ways have paid off – she's Opportunity Partners' first client to shift from the mailroom training program to a supported employment position. Industry giant General Mills boasts new turf and familiar work for Katie as she reports to their mailroom several days each week.

"In 2008, the mailroom at Opportunity Partners transformed into a training site where clients would come in to work for three-month intervals," said Opportunity Partners Manager Tammy Green. "Katie is one of the very few who started right in the beginning of the transition."

Joe Miller, the instructor for the mailroom, has overseen Katie for several years and witnessed her perform duties that stretch beyond the mailroom. "She was my noon-to-three worker at the Opportunity Partners cafeteria on Mondays," he said. "She made change for people, heated lunches

and opened packages for them; she was my overall go-to person."

Demonstrating superior efforts in precision, versatility and self-sufficiency led to an on-the-job evaluation at General Mills. In turn, this ultimately made way for Katie to take the reins as the newest member of General Mills' mailroom team.

"She was ecstatic about her newfound responsibilities," said Tammy and Joe, nearly in unison. While she still subs at Opportunity Partners, her schedule is expected to expand at General Mills. Her daily duties include sorting, delivering and picking up mail.

Staff and management alike marvel at Katie's ability to wear different hats. She continues to contribute to Opportunity Partners' cafeteria and mailroom, all the while fulfilling her responsibilities at the General Mills' mailroom. "She's a really good worker," Joe said.



Stephanie sat down recently to discuss Opportunity Partners' Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS), which gives people with disabilities the latitude to design and direct their own services and supports. At Opportunity Partners, Stephanie serves as a Support Planner to help people with disabilities develop and put into action a plan to administer CDCS.

What is CDCS?

CDCS is a one-of-a-kind service option that allows individuals and families to design and direct services. Tailoring a support plan to meet individual needs gives clients the opportunity to combine self-designed services with adult care services, or with federally-approved waiver services and state plan home care services.

Currently, Opportunity Partners provides Support Planning services to 10 people with disabilities, and we are eager to grow the program.

How does it work?

Support Planning takes an individual-centered approach to assist people with disabilities to develop, implement and maintain a community support plan that best serves personal goals and needs. I can help purchase services, interview potential support staff or locate opportunities for community inclusion. For medical inquiries and new therapies, Opportunity Partners also has a residential staff nurse who provides one-on-one consultations.

What kind of yearly planning will the Support Planner provide?

There are a number of ways I might assist a family. For example, I can:

- Assist in the development and revision of a Community Support Plan.
- Be a part of the individual-centered planning process addressing strengths, needs and preferences.
- Provide choices for providers of direct services, goods, or supportive services, and decide how much service will be needed.

- Calculate the costs of the goods and services to meet the CDCS budget.
- Negotiate payment rates for direct services, goods and supportive services.
- Outline desired results and develop a plan to measure achievement of results.

As the Support Planner, I will also monitor plan progression and effectiveness, make revisions as needed and notify the lead agency case manager of significant changes in need.

What's included in a Community Support Plan?

In a Community Support Plan, I work with a person or family to identify desired outcomes and align it with services, goods and supports. Services include but are not limited to:

- Personal care
- Home and money management
- Sensory/motor development
- Community living
- Day program
- Leisure and recreation

Logistics such as support types, sites and costs will be determined to ensure all factors fit the budget criteria. Safeguards to maintain an individual's health and welfare such as backup services and emergency plans will also be addressed.

What can I gain from designing a CDCS plan?

CDCS can result in increased independence. A client's sense of being in and of the community will develop, making way for maximized self-sufficiency and enhanced life skills. CDCS also increases opportunities for family and friends to receive proper training to provide support, which decreases dependence on formal support services.

To learn more, contact Stephanie McGhie at 612-825-8681 or smcghie@opportunities.org.

Good as gold *Dog, owner build bridges in classrooms*



Andy Scheer shakes Rudy's paw in class.

Minnetonka resident Peter Graves turned a job lay-off into an opportunity to share his time – and his friendly golden retriever – with participants at Opportunity Partners.

After losing his job at a financial services firm, Peter adopted Rudy, 6, from a local breed rescue group. As he looked for work and pondered early retirement, Peter found solace in caring for and training Rudy.

The team now volunteers two half-days per week at Opportunity Partners, participating in activities like "paw print painting" in the art room and jumping through a hoop in exercise class.

The volunteerism also gave Peter an opportunity to come full circle in his career. He worked for Opportunity Partners (then Opportunity Workshop) 30 years ago as a job counselor before shifting careers to financial planning. "I always had a love for this place," he said. "I thought this would be a nice way to become involved again."

Peter sees many benefits to having Rudy in the classes. "Rudy is a calming, relaxing influence," he noted. "He's a lovely dog," said Andy Scheer, who recalls as a boy having his own dog. Another client, Josh, accompanies Peter and Rudy on short walks on the trails near Opportunity Partners. Josh relishes the undivided attention he gets from Peter and Rudy during strolls around the campus.

The clients also enjoy watching Peter lead Rudy through obedience lessons. "If Rudy doesn't do it right, we try again until he does it, and that teaches that you have to keep trying in life," Peter added.

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons Rudy has taught is how to turn a negative – like a job loss – into a positive. "I'm practicing retirement, but I'm not very good at it," Peter said. "Volunteering keeps me involved and active."



Peter Graves

A mother's words

The talents of Opportunity Partners staff make a difference every day in the lives of the people served. Here is an excerpt of a letter Michael's mom wrote to an Opportunity Partners service planner.

I heard my son singing in his room the other night. I peeked into his room and found him dancing to his iPod and singing along to a song. This made me smile.

While this might not seem to be an out of the ordinary experience to parents of teens and young adults, to the parent of a special needs individual who has faced many challenges over the years, this was amazing. It had never occurred before. When I mentioned later I had heard him singing in his room and asked if there was a special occasion for this, he blushed and replied, "Mom, I am just a happy kid."

I stepped away before he could see the tears in my eyes.

I looked back over the past year in his life, and realized a transformation has occurred. He graduated from his school-based transition program and began his new program at Opportunity Partners. ... The transition to

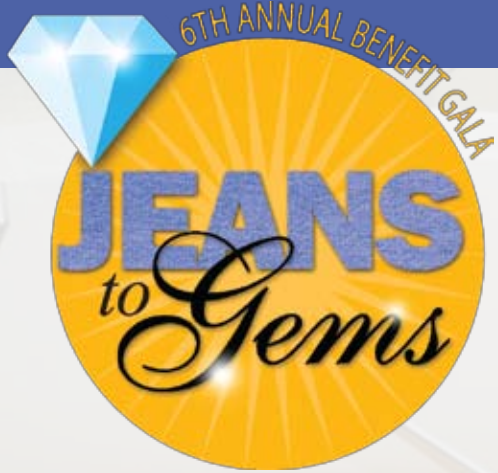
your program was wonderful. We met many kind and caring individuals. I could not imagine the changes that would occur in him and in our family.

He is happy. He is becoming increasingly independent in his skills at home. He is socially outgoing with friends and family. He calls people to talk on a cell phone. He is proud of his work at Opportunity Partners and shares his day with us. This is an amazing change in him and I thank you for this. ... I have a calm and happy son on his way to an independent life.

I wish to thank you for everything you do for Michael and for me. ... You and OP have made amazing and astounding changes in our lives, and all of us in our family are thankful and grateful and happy.

Parents Jean and John

Family Focus



Singer Meaghan Dosch with her parents Michelle and Andrew.



Aspiring personal chef Matt Gotham with auctioneer Karen Sorbo.

Gala dazzles

From denim to diamonds, more than 300 guests and volunteers dazzled the Sofitel Minneapolis in Bloomington October 15 at Opportunity Partners' "Jeans to Gems" gala event. The largest fundraiser of the year for Opportunity Partners raised needed dollars and most importantly, connected new friends to the cause.

Highlights included:

- Opportunity Partners participant Meaghan Dosch drew a standing ovation with her heartfelt solo of "Think of Me" from Phantom of the Opera.
- A private, gourmet dinner for eight prepared by Opportunity Partners participant Matt Gotham was auctioned for an impressive \$1,800. Matt, an aspiring personal chef and cook at Crave restaurant, has donated the dinner for the past three years.
- The Fund-A-Need for technology for Opportunity Partners participants, raised money for equipment and curriculum including Nintendo Wii gaming systems, residential electronic monitors and Augmentative Communication Device training.

Thank you to our generous gold sponsors:



Babs & David Koch



Teddy Spencer bids for an auction item.



John Gustafson demonstrates his Augmentative Communication Device.



Board member Jane McCrossan with CEO George Klauser.

Gala photos by Cara Buettner and Craig Munson.

DONOR FOCUS

Pohlad Family Foundation extends generous support

Opportunity Partners thanks the Pohlad Family Foundation for a \$25,000 gift for its *Building Opportunities for Life* Capital Campaign. The remodeling of Opportunity Partners' Koch Technical & Training Campus added new, modern classrooms and vocational training areas to better prepare people with disabilities for career opportunities.

The Pohlad Family Foundation provides support to charitable organizations that positively impact the quality of life in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

This gift has helped Opportunity Partners raise \$206,000 toward a \$350,000 matching challenge grant that it received earlier this year from an anonymous donor. To learn how you can contribute to the Capital Campaign challenge grant, contact Sue Hayes at 952-930-4202 or shayes@opportunities.org.

Wrap it up ... Building Opportunities for Life Capital Campaign Challenge

The \$350,000 challenge to wrap up the capital campaign needs YOU to help wrap it up. Although we are over halfway to the goal, we need your help with the remaining \$140,000. Only with your help will it be successful.

We are counting on you so we can move forward into the future together and make the hopes and dreams of the people we serve a reality.

Thank you for your generosity.



Marketing support for a great cause

Staff at Priority Integrated Marketing present Sara Maaske of Opportunity Partners with a donation of \$2,000. Priority Integrated Marketing is providing Web redesign work to Opportunity Partners. Staff from the firm have also volunteered at Opportunity Partners, painting picnic tables on the organization's grounds.

Get ready to give November 16

Opportunity Partners and other nonprofit organizations throughout Minnesota will ask for the community's support during the second annual "Give to the Max Day" on November 16.

Sponsored by GiveMN, last year's Give to the Max Day inspired more than 38,000 donors to contribute \$14 million for 3,434 Minnesota nonprofits. It became the most successful one-day online fundraising drive in history, smashing the previous record of \$3.8 million raised in Dallas.

GiveMN will offer several incentives in 2010 to encourage participation, including:

- A \$20,000 and \$10,000 prize grant will be awarded to the top two nonprofits in the Twin Cities that attract the largest number of individual donors on Give to the Max Day.
- Throughout the event, an individual donor will be randomly chosen every hour to have an additional \$1,000 given to the charity that received the donor's original donation.

More information is available at <http://givemn.razoo.com/story/Opportunity-Partners>



Growing Karlins mirrors expanding curriculum

By Jamie Christianson

As natural light becomes the head of class at Opportunity Partners' Karlins Center, it was only a matter of time before supply met demand. Last spring indicated a turning point for Karlins: a building renovation, more sophisticated than any other alterations the building has undergone, was approved and ready to match the needs of a budding curriculum. Karlins Center, located in Plymouth, is a program serving people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and similar disabilities.

"In 2004 there was an expansion due to an increase in capacity from 35 to 50 individuals, but this time our main focus was on the classrooms," said Manager Michele Anderson. Renovation plans were targeted on stunning spaces, a polished use of materials and leeway for natural light to percolate throughout the classrooms.

"A lot of the classrooms were positioned on the interior part of the building but, with the exception of our gym and sensory rooms, we needed a shift to the exterior," Michele said. A reorganization of classrooms was mandated as windows became the priority. "Our clients have special needs," Michele emphasized. "Natural light was key."

Within four months, significant changes occurred. The production floor acquired a warehouse. The gymnasium divided into two sections: one dedicated to physical activity and the other for music and relaxation (Eagles and Elvis vinyl are popular choices). Appliances and top-of-the-line technology were introduced to the class list. Classes became paired with calming and comforting spaces. "We're able to spread out now and have designated classrooms as opposed to traveling around with our supplies," Michele said.

Opportunity Partners held a rededication of the center on August 3 to showcase the remodel and pay tribute to the late Miriam Karlins, a pioneer of change in disability services. Speakers included Miriam's daughter Annette Weinberg, Opportunity Partners' CEO George Klauser and past Board member John Lavander.



Karlins Center supporters John Lavander and Nan Owen and CEO George Klauser stand near the Miriam Karlins portrait and memorial.

Wafflelicious!

The Edina Lions' Belgian waffle breakfast October 3 at South View Middle School in Edina raised \$1,200 for Opportunity Partners. The event drew several hundred people who turned out for hot waffles and live music – all for a good cause.



Alvin Cruse gets ready to dig in.

Speakers available

Learn how people with disabilities add value to our world by inviting an Opportunity Partners speaker to your workplace, service club or church. Speakers and trainings on disability topics are available at no cost. Contact Opportunity Partners today at 952-930-4208 or info@opportunities.org



Made in the Shade participants included staff and clients from Opportunity Partners' Hennepin SILS program who raised more than \$1,125, earning a pizza party with CEO George Klauser for their efforts.

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