

### Hearts of gratitude, thanks to you

For Danielle Rue, 29, finding a job that aligns with her personal goals and values fills her heart with happiness. Danielle recently celebrated one year at KinderCare Learning Center in Hopkins, where she works as a classroom instructor.

“I’ve always felt this is the field I need to be in,” said Danielle. “I relate well to the families, and the kids are great.”

Opportunity Partners helped set the stage for success for Danielle by offering her job readiness training and skills for independence.

Job Development Specialist Rick Grimes worked alongside Danielle to identify employment goals, apply for jobs and prepare for interviews. She was excited to land a position as a classroom assistant at KinderCare in August 2018. But she wasn’t done yet. While she worked part-time and parented two children of her own, Danielle attended weekly classes to obtain her Child Development Associate certification to be an independent classroom instructor. “It was hard and intense,” she described. “At times, I wanted to quit.”

She persevered, passed her course and was promoted to having her own classroom of toddlers, ages 1-2 years. “We keep them busy,” she said, describing the group time, outdoor play and educational activities that help children thrive. “I love it here. This is my community.”

Born in Liberia, Danielle came to the United States as a child and lived in foster care and a group home throughout her teen years. She earned her high

school diploma through Transitions Plus before coming to Opportunity Partners for job training and experience.

Danielle credits Opportunity Partners with helping teach her about the importance of a strong work ethic and advocating for herself. “The basic things I learned at OP have helped me here.”

She said OP staff have been “tough but honest” and have pushed her. “I’m trying to be a leader,” she said. “Everyone has held me to a high standard.”

Her supervisors are happy to have Danielle on their team. “Watching Danielle grow in her profession as an early childhood educator has been an incredible journey,” said KinderCare Center Director Julie Condon. “From the beginning, it was easy to see she was a natural fit because of her passion for children. She is committed and stays focused.”

Julie describes Danielle as loving and always at the child’s level. “She knows her children and does her best to provide a positive growing environment for her class. She loves to sing to the children as much as they love to sing with her.”

When she’s not working, Danielle spends time with her children, who are 3 and 4, and attends Grace Church in Eden Prairie.

She thanks everyone – OP staff and supporters, her co-workers, and church and community role models – for encouraging her and helping her achieve so much. “I’m very proud of myself,” she said. “I’m also very blessed and grateful.”



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# Celebrating success, thanks to you

## Message from the CEO

*Armando Camacho*

Our annual Success Celebration, held September 15 at the Hyland Hills Chalet in Bloomington, recognized individuals in the categories of Impact, Choice, Heart, Partnership and Spirit. This event means so much to all of us at Opportunity Partners because we are recognizing people for accomplishments that are at the very core of our mission. Whether getting a new job, increasing independence at home, advocating for oneself, or achieving a major goal, these successes all enhance quality of life.

### Impact Award – Torin Echols-Moore

Torin earned the Impact Award for his achievements in competitive, integrated employment.

After taking classes and gaining work skills on a Supported Employment Team, he began his journey to independent employment. Torin wanted a job close to home and where he could help people. He identified the lot attendant position at Home Depot as a good match for his skills and goals. With a little support, he completed the application, nailed his interview and accepted the position. Recently, Torin was credited for inspiring a peer to participate in our employment program called Together Works Better. When asked if he would like to be a peer mentor for an employment exploration participant, Torin said yes without hesitation.



### Choice Award – Emily

Emily earned the Choice Award for committing to a budget. A few months ago, Emily's staff helped her figure out a budget. The staff didn't hear anything about it for a while until she asked Emily one day about it. Emily told staff she had been following the budget, hadn't over-drafted her checking account, and had managed to save \$600! She said she now gets great enjoyment from saving her money. Emily is working hard to plan for future events and is excited to be able to provide for her family. Emily's choice to manage her finances is paying off in big ways.

### Heart Award – Ken Carlson

Ken earned the Heart Award for being a hard worker and a good person. In June, Opportunity Partners' Ensign House - Ken's home- was destroyed in a fire. He has experienced several moves since then, including staying at hotels and finally a group home being leased from another organization. In spite of this tragic situation, Ken has been coming to work daily and working hard. He is also helpful to staff and peers. Ken earned the Heart Award because of the courage he displayed while dealing with the disruption, and for giving it his all in spite of such trying circumstances.



### Partnership Award – Alan

Alan earned the Partnership Award for his growth in independence. Over the last year Alan has worked to make his own choices and create opportunities for self-growth; this started with him learning how to manage his Metro Mobility rides. In the past, Alan depended on staff to manage his rides and activities. Since learning how to set up demand rides, Alan is active every weekend and invites peers to movies, restaurants and shopping. He has created a social group that regularly meets for coffee or to watch movies.



### Spirit Award – Warren John

Warren earned the Spirit Award for keeping a positive attitude during times of change. He's maintaining relationships and advocating for himself and others. Last fall, Warren discovered that after 20 years of living in a home with two other men, he would have to move. We had provided in-home staff for Warren and his roommates every morning and evening, so he was accustomed to having staff readily available. While Warren transitioned to a new apartment, he also adapted to not having staff available every day. He has become more independent and self-sufficient, and has handled these changes with an upbeat nature.



**Thanks to everyone who turned out for our Success Celebration!**

## You help Darren excel

*Long-time Target employee shines*

Darren May, 34, handles his cashiering duties at Target-Knollwood with skill, moving customers through the line with speed and accuracy. His talents have been recognized by his supervisors, and in January he was promoted to be a trainer of new cashiers.

“Cashier is the position I enjoy the most here,” said Darren, adding that his 13-year career at Target has included positions in the deli, as a stocker and then cart attendant before advancing to cashier and trainer.

He has an excellent memory, knowing most of the produce codes which means he doesn't have to take the time to look at the label before entering in the code. This speeds up his line, which customers appreciate. Darren found his career at Target in 2006 with the assistance of Opportunity Partners. Staff member Nick Jensen, who has worked with Darren about four years, said Darren is an excellent employee. “He's gone through a lot of changes here, and he's a really good team player. He's a quick learner and doesn't need a lot from me to learn the job. He does a great job with customers.”

Darren has received many compliments from customers, including a comment sent to Target corporate describing



Darren as “a very nice, friendly, good cashier and as a retail manager myself, I appreciate employees like him.”

He has also earned numerous internal awards for helping customers sign up for store credit cards.

In his free time, Darren enjoys fishing with his family – once catching a 34-inch Northern on Lake Minnetonka – and is a huge Halloween fanatic. He also likes to hang out with his best friends, Alec and Chris, who he's known since childhood.

**OP helps businesses find great employees like Darren. Want to learn how we can help? Go to [opportunities.org](https://opportunities.org) to find out more.**

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Opportunity Partners

*gala*

Save the Date  
May 2, 2020

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# Together

we advance the quality of  
life for people with disabilities.



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Your support means so much!  
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"I am learning about my  
community more and seeing  
what's out in front of you."  
– Christi

"I like to see my staff and mingling  
with people. They call me a social  
butterfly."  
–Yohan

"I heard OP was a good place. I  
like meeting new friends here."  
– Amber

"I've grown, I've matured,  
I'm still learning as a  
person with a disability."  
– Dayna

"OP makes me feel  
happy inside."  
– Ari

"I like my staff; they  
make me laugh."  
– Jack

"I like to be motivated  
by work."  
– Aaron

# Win-win solutions: our specialty

Meeting customers' production needs has been an Opportunity Partners priority since 1953. Today's companies may have very different work demands than they did 66 years ago, but our end goal is the same: to help customers meet their production goals with a variety of work options.



*Melissa, Kevin and Dayna work with Climatech products.*

Eden Prairie's Climatech is a manufacturer and distributor of plastics and die-cut components for window and door companies, appliance manufacturers, and many more industries. The company turned to Opportunity Partners earlier this year for a convenient labor solution when finding reliable workers was challenging. In less than a year's time, Opportunity Partners has completed nearly 400,000 pieces in the 14 different jobs it runs for Climatech. Sample projects are sometimes exclusively manual, like applying adhesive to materials or using tools to complete a de-burring project.

"Climatech has become a great partner for Opportunity Partners," said Bonnie Hagen, Senior Director of Business Development. "We have become an integral part of their production process. With good communication and seamless logistics, we stay close to their needs, timelines and budgets."

With the increasing gap between U.S. job openings and available workers, many manufacturers say workforce shortages are hurting growth. That's where Opportunity Partners steps in, handling product assembly, packaging and kitting. Individuals gain valuable experience working on Opportunity Partners' production floors, often leading to new job opportunities at community Supported Employment Teams or independent jobs.

**[Learn more at opportunities.org/businesses/hire-us/](https://opportunities.org/businesses/hire-us/)**

# Otto Bremer Trust aids community living

Thank you to the Otto Bremer Trust for awarding Opportunity Partners a \$30,000 grant in 2019 to provide training and assistance to help people with disabilities live independently in the Twin Cities.

Dawn Beebe exemplifies successful living. With support from Opportunity Partners, Dawn has been gradually gaining more independence in her life. Dawn lives in her own condominium and receives up to eight hours of community living support from Opportunity Partners each week, with staff assisting with grocery shopping, banking and other activities. Dawn works part-time at Culver's, and has learned to do her laundry independently and in a timely manner in order to keep her work uniform clean. Staff support her to make wise money decisions, while empowering her to make choices for herself.

In all, she has made great strides toward independence in many areas of her life. Living on her own and making her own choices feels good, Dawn said. "It makes me happy."

The Otto Bremer Trust is a bank holding company and a private charitable trust based in Saint Paul that works at the intersection of finance and philanthropy.



*Dawn Beebe (left) works with Heather Brueske of Opportunity Partners on banking as part of the community living supports she receives.*

# Opportunities

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