

### Your support means we never give up

If you meet Sam today, you are immediately drawn to his exuberant smile and friendly questions.

"He really has such joy and such love and he's so happy," Sam's mom Denine said. His dad Ben added, "He walks in and lights up a room. He always leaves an impression."

#### *Difficult beginnings*

This is such a change from a few years ago when Sam's autism brought explosive behavior episodes that even his own parents could not handle. Things continued to get worse as Sam got older. He would leave home in the middle of the night, and police were called to find him. He would break windows, shatter glasses. He was not happy, and his parents were struggling to keep him safe.

The hardest time was when the family made the difficult and emotional decision to have Sam move to a group home when he was just 10 years old. Denine recalls through tears: "I used to lay in bed at night thinking what is going to become of this child?"

#### *A breakthrough*

After the turbulent adolescent years, a turning point came when Sam's family found Opportunity Partners-Karlins Center in Plymouth which specializes in adults with autism

and other similar needs. Denine said she knew from the start that Opportunity Partners wanted to help Sam. "They were just really there for people," she said. "I mean it's really extraordinary."

But at first, Sam wouldn't engage with staff or peers at Karlins, hiding his face behind a book every day. His staff Jackie Helm searched for anything that would help reach Sam. Eventually, she asked for permission to send text messages to Sam, and that led to a breakthrough. "Slowly over time he started being more comfortable putting the book down," Jackie said. "And ever since then, it's just Sam all the time happy and wanting to have conversations and getting to know people."

Life is very different for Sam now. He is happy at his group home, enjoys hanging out with friends, going to movies, taking "selfies" on his phone, and taking enrichment classes and doing light packaging work at Karlins Center.

Sam's parents are grateful to everyone who has supported their son over the years and are especially thankful for Opportunity Partners. "There were so many people who just never gave up," Ben said. "It's really changed his life ... it's changed everything for him."



See Sam's story at [opportunities.org/Sam](https://opportunities.org/Sam)  
Read more inside: Q & A with Sam

# Living our values with my 88-year-old grandpa

## Message from the CEO

*Armando Camacho*

At Opportunity Partners, I often talk about our values of Impact, Choice, Heart and Partnership as we work to advance the quality of life for people with disabilities.

However, I seldom talk about how these same values play out in our personal lives. I believe that when we recognize and embrace these values in all areas of our lives, it helps bring us even closer to these values in our work at OP.

Some of you may know that I came to Minnesota from Puerto Rico with my grandparents when I was 6 years old. My grandparents, who raised me, hoped for a better life for us here. I was fortunate to have many opportunities for education and employment as I grew into adulthood.

Four years ago, my grandma died, and my grandpa was struggling with health issues of his own. He gave up his apartment, and I helped find him an assisted living environment.

But recently, my grandpa, 88, had become increasingly unsatisfied here. His primary language is Spanish, and he struggled to communicate with frequently changing staff and often seemed confused due to his dementia.

However, one thing was clear: he said he wanted to return to his homeland of Puerto Rico to live closer to his sister and other relatives there.

At first, I did not think this would be possible. But then I began to consider how I might help my grandpa achieve this dream. In February, I bought my grandpa a one-way plane ticket and I traveled with him to get him resettled in Puerto Rico – in a place within walking distance to his sister.

As I worked through this major life change with my grandpa, the OP values of Impact, Choice, Heart and Partnership came to mind.

**Impact** – While my grandpa lived in the assisted living center, the staff around him worked to make a difference in his life. The senior care field faces similar challenges as the disability services sector in terms of staff wages, high turnover



*Armando and Anselmo Camacho*

and budget constraints. I saw how the staff did the best they could in spite of these challenges, just as we do at OP.

**Choice** – At OP, we strive to help people lead self-directed lives as much as possible. We try to balance choice with the need for health and safety. In my grandpa’s case, his choice to move back to Puerto Rico was top in his mind. My job was to make sure my grandpa understood his decision fully, and that I found him a care center there that would meet his needs.

**Heart** – We strive to promote the dignity and worth of each other in our work at OP. For my grandpa, my desire to help him move back home centered around his dignity and worth. I did what I could to make it happen and to help make the transition smooth for him.

**Partnership** – Our work at OP depends on relationships, collaboration and advocacy. Likewise, for my grandpa, we have many medical and social service partners both here and in Puerto Rico that are working with us to coordinate his care and ensure his needs are met. As we say at OP - together, we are better!

In all, this experience with my grandpa has heightened my attention to the values of Impact, Choice, Heart and Partnership and why they are so important – not only at Opportunity Partners – but in all areas of our lives. And how the support of people like you – our OP “family” – makes all of our work possible.



## Faces of OP: Meet Sam

*Sam, whose story is featured on the cover, talks about attending Opportunity Partners-Karlins Center, his job at Potbelly Sandwich Shop, and life in general.*

### **How did you feel when you found out you got the job at Potbelly?**

I like it! I was so happy!

### **What do you like best about your job at Potbelly?**

I like to wipe the tables, clean, sweep, say hi to people. I like Carol, my job coach. She is so nice, so sweet.

### **What do you like to eat at Potbelly?**

Ham and cheese!

### **What's your favorite food?**

Ice cream! Strawberry or cherry.

### **What do you like to do when you aren't working?**

I hang out with people and talk to people.

### **You live in a Hammer residence with three roommates. What's it like?**

I like my group home. They're so nice and sweet to me.

### **What are your favorite hobbies?**

Play my video games (Yoshi, Kirby, Donkey Kong), go to movies, to the mall

### **Do you have any pets?**

My dog Katie, a sweetheart. I like my puppy!

### **What other types of jobs are you interested in?**

Police officer or security at Mall of America or Target.

## Asplin art program earns state award

*Your support brings art to life*

*"Art makes me happy and I feel good doing it." – Dana*

*"That's my thing, I love art! When I'm doing art, I'm always a happy person." – Anne*

*"Josh has learned new abilities he didn't know he had and there is nothing but positive things to say about the art program," – parent Kim Buell*

Dana, Anne and Josh are just three of the many individuals benefiting from the art classes at Opportunity Partners-Asplin Center in Plymouth, and now the program has won a statewide award.

The Minnesota Organization for Habilitation & Rehabilitation (MOHR) will recognize the program this month with a Life Enrichment Award for its impact on personal growth, increased confidence and engagement.



*JT Buell pictured with his artwork*

Asplin's art program began to gain momentum after the 2015 remodel of the center when an initial donation from a family paid for frames and supplies. Once paintings and photographs started being displayed on the walls, individuals got more excited and it escalated from there with an annual art show and more classes being offered.

The art has been displayed at community art shows, loaned to other OP sites for display, featured on OP notecards, and a design by Faith was selected this year for one of the buttons given out at Disability Services Day at the Capitol.

OP art instructor Teresa Sundlin said she has seen many positive impacts of the program. "Some individuals say, 'I can't do it' or 'That's too hard.' I like to encourage them to try and see what happens," she said. "The individuals' confidence soars with each accomplishment and skill they try!"

### **See how your support matters!**

**Annual OP-Asplin Center Art Show**

Thursday, May 30, 4-7 p.m.

(brief MOHR award presentation at 5 p.m.)

Asplin Center, 10000 51st Ave. N., Plymouth 55442



# gala

APRIL 27, 2019

View more photos at [opportunities.org](http://opportunities.org) or on Facebook!



# Working together for success

*OP provides important step in process*

Our community is better when we all work together.

Cannon Equipment, a Marmon/Berkshire Hathaway Company, helps companies improve their operations and gain efficiencies by designing custom material handling carts, equipment, conveyance and aftermarket parts. Their commitment to community is strong.

Like Opportunity Partners, the people at Cannon Equipment are problem-solvers at heart. They needed to assemble "test pallets," which are sent with each new conveyor system. The boxes require a specific weight of sand inside, and colored dots and bar codes on each box to be detected by the conveyor system. Cannon Equipment found it difficult to keep up with the demand for the box assembly so turned to OP to help solve their workforce challenge.

OP recommended a Vendor Managed Inventory program, which allows a seamless solution. OP handles the procurement of the materials and assembles the pallets to Cannon Equipment's forecast.

This project is a great example of OP teamwork as each step allows people with varied skill levels to contribute. One day recently, Rick scooped sand into bags and weighed them, while Alex taped boxes. Meanwhile, Rebecca and Victor stuck dots and bar codes onto boxes and stacked them on a pallet. In all, OP has assembled more than 17,000 boxes since starting the job last summer.

John Evans, Cannon Equipment's Director of HR, Health & Safety, said Opportunity Partners is a valuable partner. "This

was a new project for us and we had our own employees putting the boxes together for the first few weeks, including our senior management on the weekends, before we began working with OP."

He added that OP enables

Cannon Equipment to have a reliable and timely supply of the testing boxes and frees up its own employees to concentrate on more complex assembly operations.

John said he would recommend Opportunity Partners to other companies. "OP has been very helpful, reliable, responsive, timely and cost-effective."

**Contact us today for help with packaging, shrink-wrapping, kitting, collating and labeling. Call 952-930-4201 or email [partner@opportunities.org](mailto:partner@opportunities.org)**



*Above, Rick works on weighing bags of sand to fill test boxes. Below, boxes assembled by Opportunity Partners in use at Cannon Equipment.*



# Together we are better!

*Rallying for improved funding*

About 40 persons served and staff from Opportunity Partners headed to the State Capitol March 12 for the annual Disability Services Day. We were among an estimated 1,000 individuals, employees, families and advocates who rallied, met with legislators and asked for changes in the sector. More competitive wages for Direct Support Professionals to help with the severe workforce shortage, more sustainable funding for the future and many other issues were discussed.



# Opportunities

Volume 46 • Issue 2 • Spring 2019

952-938-5511  
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opportunities.org

Published in the interest of families, friends  
and supporters of Opportunity Partners, Inc.  
This newsletter is available in alternative  
formats by request.

Editor:  
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Designer:  
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