

## From an institution to a caring community

*Jim's journey to Opportunity Partners proves life-changing*

Imagine being sent away from your family to live in an institution at the tender age of 4 or 5.

For Jim Forsythe, now 60, that was the sad reality for him and many other children with disabilities because families often had no other choices.

Jim sustained a disability at birth and was placed in an institution when he could no longer be cared for at home, said his brother Mike Cuppy.

"I didn't really have any interaction with Jim for many years," added Mike, who is now his brother's legal guardian.

### Life in an institution

Jim's childhood in the institution was lonely and difficult. "Nobody taught him how to socialize," said Jim's sister-in-law Michele, adding he never went to school or learned to read or write. "He didn't trust anybody," she said. "It breaks my heart to know that he was that way for so long."

When Jim was a teenager, he was moved to Faribault State Hospital. It was there that Mike and Michele began to visit him and would bring him home for holiday visits. In 1991 – when Jim was 28 – they finally were able to get him released and he moved to a group home in the Twin Cities. His life began to turn around.

Sadly, the state hospitals had taught Jim that being isolated and alone were safest, but gradually that started to change.

### Finding a community at Opportunity Partners

After the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jim found community at Opportunity Partners-Karlins Center in Plymouth, where he thrives. "Opportunity Partners has brought his personality out," Mike said.

***"He feels comfortable and he feels loved.  
He can be himself. We saw the difference."***

Jim looks forward to going to OP every day where he has friends and goes for walks, visits the Animal Humane Society, and participates in "open mike" and other activities that keep him busy.

At home, he enjoys helping with chores, dabbling with electronics, listening to music – everything from Rock & Roll to classical – and watching oldies like "I Love Lucy."



*Jim (far right) was sent to live at an institution when he was just 5 years old after his family was no longer able to care for him.*

The family appreciates his sense of humor. "He's a part of our lives and we enjoy him," Michele said.

Opportunity Partners is his community. "He loves all the staff and he's confident with everyone there," she said. "He feels the love and the trust." He recently earned OP's Heart Award because of the care he shows others, including opening doors and offering to get things for staff and peers. He says, "I missed you" when others return after being gone.

The family is not sure where Jim would be without Opportunity Partners. "We're so happy that he has a great program to fill his day," Mike said. "His health and well-being have improved because of what you do."

***Watch Jim' story of resilience at:  
[opportunities.org/jim](https://opportunities.org/jim)***



*(Left to right) Bill Schultz, Michele Cuppy, Jim Forsythe and Mike Cuppy. Jim won an OP Heart Award in 2022 for the care he shows others.*

## A Message from the CEOs

For the first time in our organization's 70-year history, we are now operating under a co-CEO model. I'm pleased to announce that Lori Schluttenhofer, our Vice President of Day & Employment Services, has been promoted to CEO of Services. My title has changed to CEO of Operations & Strategy.

Lori has worked for Opportunity Partners since 2012 and has been in the disability sector throughout her career. She is a leader at Opportunity Partners and within the entire intellectual and developmental disability field, including within our industry trade association.

The need in our community for the services Opportunity Partners provides continues to grow. I believe our new structure will help us face the ongoing headwinds of funding gaps and staffing shortages to ensure Opportunity Partners continues to thrive.

Lori and I have worked closely together to lead the organization since June 2020. This new structure formalizes this partnership and recognizes her many contributions to Opportunity Partners. We will continue our collaborative approach under this model and build on each other's strengths.

I'm excited about these changes at Opportunity Partners, and I look forward to continuing to partner with our staff, our Board of Directors, the people we serve and their families, our business partners and the entire community to advance our mission.

Thank you for your support.



Bill Schultz  
CEO of Operations & Strategy



Lori Schluttenhofer  
CEO of Services

Opportunity  
Partners   
Celebrating 70 years

## New Board member!

*OP welcomes a new member to the Board of Directors*



Opportunity Partners welcomes **Jack Lee** to our Board of Directors. Jack serves as the Executive Director of Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS). He brings years of business and nonprofit leadership, including at Intel Corporation and Youth Frontiers. He has been involved as a Rotarian, served on the board of Upstream Arts and was a part of volunteer leadership at the

Basilica of St. Mary. He and his wife Laura have three children and enjoy long road trips. Welcome, Jack!

## Thank you, C.H. Robinson Foundation

A heartfelt thank you to the C.H. Robinson Foundation for awarding Opportunity Partners a \$12,500 grant in 2022 for our programs that help people with disabilities live more independently in the community. OP offers supported apartment programs and In-Home Services that help people live in their own home or apartments with individualized life skills training and other support as needed.



Barry petting a llama during a community outing.

## History Corner

Opportunity Partners started in 1953 as Opportunity Workshop by parents of teenagers with disabilities. They were determined to find ways for their children to socialize and be productive – outside of an institution.

The first people served by the organization did light packaging and learned skills for greater independence. Now celebrating 70 years, Opportunity Partners has helped thousands of people with disabilities over the years.

Today, we serve over 1,200 adults throughout the Minneapolis/St. Paul area in Employment, Enrichment and Residential services.

Together, we help people develop skills and independence at work, at home and throughout their lives!



Opportunity Partners was started out of a small house.



OP has offered employment services for the last 70 years.

**Learn more at [opportunities.org](https://opportunities.org)**



# Luca's dog treat success

*OP starts working with a new paw-tner, packaging up to 1,500 pounds of treats each month!*

Luca & the Five Girls™ is a teen-owned and operated business that has been a lesson in entrepreneurship for its five founders. Twin sisters Kate and Elli, Lauren, Emery and Rylie have been making organic dog treats since 2017.

Their story began at the twins' aunt Susan Johnson's "art camp" with an exercise in starting a business. Since then, Luca & the Five Girls™ has evolved into a self-sustaining and still growing company! "The story is as important as the product. It's so unique," said Susan. After the pandemic opened doors for working remotely, the girls have explored ways they can take the business to the next level. "Maybe we can work remotely when we are in college," said Kate.

The girls pivoted to redesigned treat bags and a more streamlined packaging system in 2021. "We wanted to do things differently and stand out," said Susan. They collaborated with Boom Chicka Pop's designer to create elevated bags featuring Susan's beloved dog Luca and avatars of each of the girls for their three treat options. Through the designer's colleague, the connection to Opportunity Partners was made.

***"Choosing OP was an easy yes," Susan said.***

Each of the girls worked with students with disabilities when they were in junior high, and Susan herself worked in a group home early in her career!

OP packages 1,200 to 1,500 pounds of locally baked dog treats to be shipped out each month. "Everything has been as neat as a pin," said Susan. The girls have visited OP to see the packaging in action. "I have enjoyed being able to see how everything and everyone works together," said Lauren.

Their three flavors (Crunchy Beef, Crunchy Chicken and P'Nut Buttery Pumpkin Nummers™) can be found on the shelves of Lunds & Byerlys, boutiques and dog-friendly breweries. "We've got our eyes on growing," noted Susan. The tasty treats can now be found in 22 different states!

***Interested in working with us? Contact [partner@opportunities.org](mailto:partner@opportunities.org)***



*(Left to right) Kate Johnson, Lauren Seim, Emery Engelsma, Elli Johnson, Rylie Nelson*



*Emily loves her job at the YMCA!*

## Growing together on the job

After working on a Supported Employment Team at General Mills and at the YMCA's "Summer Power" camp, Emily has found a great job at the YMCA's childcare center; she has loved working there for the last seven years. "I love being with the kids and developing relationships with them," she said. Emily, who has autism, has cherished connecting with other kids who are on the spectrum and watching them grow.

Her Opportunity Partners staff, Kara, has seen Emily flourish in her role and is proud to be her cheerleader. "Her processing on how to better connect with others is phenomenal," she said. Kara and Emily have enjoyed working together for over a year and have made great progress in Emily's communication on the job. The pair has grown and helped each other along the way, "I have learned a lot from Emily," Kara said.

***"I take my job very seriously and I do it to the best of my ability," Emily said.***

She watches babies in the nursery, plays games with the kids and has lots of fun with them in the play castle and gym. She has a lot of patience and has been a great caregiver to all of the kids.

Kara noted that seeing Emily evolve has been a wonderful experience and has been impressed with Emily's values and work ethic. "I remember my first conversation with Emily – we talked for an hour and a half. She just brought such an ease and self-awareness; perception is her superpower," she said.

Emily is proud of her independence as she's grown and is appreciative of OP and Kara. Growing up with a disability, she reflected on feeling left out of planning for her needs. "They would talk about me like I wasn't there. Now it's great to have meetings more centered around me," she said.

***"OP has helped me further my independence. It feels good to be respected."***



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