

NURSES HELP PILLAR CARE FULFILL ITS MISSION

Pillar Care has been serving individuals with severe disabilities and medical challenges for almost 70 years. Key to the agency's ability to successfully serve this population is a highly trained and dedicated team of nurses who adapt their skills in a wide variety of program settings. Without their expertise, many of those served by Pillar would be unable to access the programming they need.

Pillar Schools rely on nurses in two very different and equally critical roles. There are currently 24 nurses who provide one-to-one assistance to students. These students need nursing support throughout the school day and their nurses are by their side to support them throughout their daily activities. In addition, there are three school nurses at both Pillar Elementary and Pillar High, who provide a range of services to students that may include the administration of medication, g-tube feedings and care of a trach tube in addition to corresponding daily with parents to update them on their child's medical status. "Working as a school nurse at one of our schools is much more involved than being a nurse at a traditional school," said Hetty Kintiroglou, Principal of Pillar Elementary. "Every single student in our school requires daily attention from the nurses."

Each of Pillar's three Day Program for Adults has a full-time nurse to care for participants in the program. These nurses must understand the medical needs of every person in the program as well as be prepared for any emergencies which might arise. They also work hard to be proactive to protect program participants. "You have to be very alert to ensure the safety of all program participants," said Joana Rocha, a nurse at the Wayne Day Program for over four years. "I'm constantly checking for safety hazards like sharp objects or wet floors that could potentially harm a participant." "Without our nurses, some of our participants would not be able to be a part of our program," said Nalini Carr-Henry, Pillar Care's Director of Day Programs. "Those we serve need and depend on them, and our staff members depend on them to support the rest of the team."

Continued on page 7



Pillar High Nurse LaTanya Acloque performing routine wellness checks on Lianna.



Jeff Milanaik, Bridge Industrial Pillar Care to Honor Jeff Milanaik

Pillar Care will honor Jeff Milanaik of Bridge Industrial at the agency's Steps to Independence Celebration on November 9th at The Grove in Cedar Grove.

"Jeff has been a longtime supporter of our organization, including serving for several years on the event committee for the Steps to Independence Celebration," said Pillar Care Board Chair Clark Machemer. "We are thankful to him for stepping into this leadership role and I know our Board and event committee will fully support him as we move forward."

For information on purchasing tickets, tables and journal ads, **please contact David Bishop** at **(973) 821-8108**.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



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Our main story in this issue of the Independent discusses the critical role our nursing team plays in helping us to carry out our mission. In our schools, day programs and group homes, we simply could not serve those who need us most without them. They truly help to shape who we are as an organization. As the pandemic swept over our agency and the world, our nurses showed their immense capacity for leadership at all levels and helped to guide us through one of the most challenging times we have ever faced. We are thankful for all that they have done and continue to do.

You will also read about our successful Steps to Independence Celebration. I want to thank our honoree, Efrem Gerszberg, as well as our incredible event committee and all of the generous donors who supported us. The funds raised from this event not only support our operations, but allow us to strengthen and grow our programs. The text-for-the-cause segment of the event sponsored key new initiatives around the agency, including our Volunteer Department's Brush With Greatness art program for our day programs (featured on page 3) and a new life skills room for our high school.

Finally, I hope you will read the story of Charlie Cohen, a Pillar Care volunteer who used his Bar Mitzvah celebration to raise funds for one of our group homes. The donations allowed us to purchase a wide array of fun and engaging items for the young men who live in the home. Charlie is one of hundreds of volunteers whose caring and kindness impacts the lives of those we serve every day. If you have not yet volunteered with us, please reach out to us and discuss the many ways you can become involved.

Enjoy the issue!

Regards,
David Bishop


CONTACT US


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Volunteer Cecil Williams helped Richard create his own Paul Klee painting

DAY PROGRAMS WELCOME RETURN OF BRUSH WITH GREATNESS

The Volunteer Department's Brush with Greatness program has returned to Pillar's Adult Day Programs. The program was started in 2011 as a way to allow participants to express themselves through art while also fostering an educational environment. Lessons led by volunteers teach participants about great artists of the past, focusing on what made them so unique. The participants then create paintings and crafts imitating the featured artist's style.

Giving program participants a chance to create their own art allows them to express themselves in ways they may not be able to in their day-to-day lives. The act of creating art offers many therapeutic benefits that lend themselves to promoting independence. As reported by the American Art Therapy Association, art therapy can promote self-awareness, reduce anxiety, and improve self-esteem. "Art is wonderful because it can relax the mind and involve the individual in the creative process," said Cecil Williams, a Pillar volunteer of over three years. "It's like music where two people can share and bond over an emotion." The Brush with Greatness program also allows day program participants to socialize with volunteers.

At the start of the pandemic, the in-person day programs were put on hold. When the programs resumed in person, participants were enthusiastic to once again be able to create art with volunteers. The relationship fostered through this program can leave a lasting impression in the lives of our day program participants. "Recently, a participant asked me where Jaclyn was," said Amy Fagan, Coordinator of Volunteer Services. "Jaclyn was a volunteer who helped out at the Wayne Day Program over three years ago, which goes to show how impactful these meetings are to our participants."

This program was made possible by donations received at the Steps to Independence Celebration (see pages 4-5). Brush with Greatness operates annually for nine weeks and rotates programming at each of our three adult day program locations- Wayne, Irvington, and Orange. If you would like to get involved, contact Corry DeMarco at cdemarco@pillarnj.org.

GERSZBERG EVENT RAISES OVER \$1.3 MILLION



(from left to right)

Gila Gerszberg, Honoree Efreem Gerszberg, Michael Petillo, Bob Murray, Phil Monaco, and Clark Machemer



Volunteer **Tommy Do** gives
a heartfelt speech at the
2021 Steps to Independence
Celebration

Pillar Care honored real estate developer Efreem Gerszberg of 2020 Acquisitions at the agency's Steps to Independence Celebration on November 3rd at The Grove in Cedar Grove. The event raised more than \$1.3 million that will support the organization's work with infants, children and adults with disabilities.

The more than 350 guests in attendance heard speeches from Clark Machemer, Chair of Pillar Care's Board of Trustees and a parent of a child at Pillar High School. Longtime volunteer Tommy Do delivered a highly emotional speech, sharing his experiences in working with those served by the agency. He encouraged guests "to move from the donor table to the dinner table" by volunteering and developing personal relationships with those served by Pillar.

Event committee member John Crimi led the text-for-the-cause segment, in which guests are asked to help sponsor specific items needed by the agency's programs. Guests donated more than \$270,000 to directly support a range of projects at Pillar Care (see list below).

Honoree Efreem Gerszberg wrapped up the evening by accepting the Steps to Independence Award and talking with guests about his experience in working with the agency and especially the students of Pillar Schools. "Efreem clearly connected with our students," said Clark, "and I know he will be thrilled to see how the funds he raised will impact the students and everyone we serve."

THANK YOU TO THE MEMBERS OF THE STEPS TO INDEPENDENCE COMMITTEE:

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TEXT-FOR-THE-CAUSE

The text-for-the-cause segment of the Steps to Independence Celebration asked guests to sponsor specific items in support of Pillar programs. Thank you to all of the generous donors who made the following possible:

- ▶ New life skills room for Pillar High School
- ▶ Outdoor awning at Pillar High to protect students from weather
- ▶ Generators for three group homes
- ▶ Digital photography program for the three Day Programs for Adults
- ▶ Program supplies for the after school programs at Pillar Schools
- ▶ Art program for three Day Programs for Adults
- ▶ Thanksgiving food baskets for families in need
- ▶ Specialized equipment for staff training
- ▶ Holiday toys and food for families in need



PILLAR
CARE CONTINUUM

Lifelong Support for People with Disabilities



(from left to right) Charlie, Patrick, and Tyler at the Northfield Ave GH.

VOLUNTEER'S BAR MITZVAH PROJECT RAISES FUNDS FOR GROUP HOME

A local volunteer recently made it his Bar Mitzvah project to help raise funds to support one of Pillar's group homes in Livingston. Charlie Cohen, a 13-year-old Pillar volunteer, started visiting the home in May 2021. He quickly formed relationships with the two young male residents there, Tyler and Patrick. The three young men bonded over basketball and sports news. "I like sports, so it was easy to talk about them with the guys from the home," said Charlie. "It's great to see how much they like playing basketball with me."

When it came time for Charlie to choose his Bar Mitzvah project, supporting Pillar matched his goals of helping others and supporting his community. "It was amazing to see the support his friends and family gave for his project and we're incredibly grateful for them," said Julie, Charlie's mother. Sixty-four individuals and families donated a total of more than \$6,500 to purchase items from an online wish list. "By sharing our mission with others, one person can have a profound impact," said Corry DeMarco, Pillar's Director of Volunteer Services. "Charlie's call to action inspired many from his community to generously donate. More importantly, he educated those who are unfamiliar with our work on the importance of supporting people with disabilities."

The funds raised from Charlie's Bar Mitzvah project helped buy new clothes, furniture, and equipment to assist the group home residents in their daily routines. The donations also helped start a new athletics program, which allowed Tyler to begin attending kickboxing lessons at a local gym. Donations also supported the purchase of toys for students at Pillar Schools, as well as supplies for our adult day programs and other group homes.

While residents greatly appreciate volunteers spending time at the homes, the relationship formed between resident and volunteer is not one-sided. The volunteer experience provides a great opportunity for personal growth. "This volunteer program has allowed Charlie to mature and see a new world a teenager wouldn't normally see," said Julie. "It would be great to see more of his friends get involved with Pillar."

The Volunteer Department is always looking for volunteers to visit the group homes. If interested, contact Amy Fagan, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, at afagan@pillarnj.org.

TRIBUTE GIFTS

If you would like to remember someone with an "in memory of" gift or celebrate a special occasion with an "in honor of" gift, please contact the Pillar Care Continuum development office at (973) 821-8036. We will notify the person of your choosing with a special card telling them that a gift was made.

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For: Robert Kaplowitz
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Marty & Judy Cowen
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In Honor Of

For: Kelly Marx's Birthday
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For: Charlie Cohen's Bar Mitzvah
By: Alexis Benbassat
Dick & Carol Blum
Angela Cohen
Andrew Cohen
Julie Cohn
Lisa Curi
Erica Facktor
Gail Ferber
Joshua Greebel
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Sylvia Norford
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Cortney Rovell
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Heidi Solomon
Jennifer Sossen
For: Kathy Morales's Special Birthday
By: William & Maureen McCartin
For: Ken Lind
By: Monica Casiello
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By: Shawna Seed
For: Alexandra Konidaris
By: Edna & George Knudsen
For: Amanda Machemer's Birthday
By: Raymond & Janet Voelpel
For: Clark Machemer's 50th Birthday
By: Charlie & Kathy Morales
For: Stephen Burke
By: Ray & Joan Best
For: Larry Sach's Birthday
By: Jerry & Nancy Korde
For: Christopher Carmona
By: Briana Schiff
For: The Leadership Institute at Kean University
By: Kyla Smith

Continued from page 1

Three of Pillar Care's 16 group homes are designated as medical group homes. Medical group homes have a nurse at the home at all times, which allows them to serve adults with developmental disabilities who are also medically fragile. A team of 17 nurses are required to support the round-the-clock services at the three medical homes. "We service such a large range of disabilities that it requires extensive knowledge and experience to provide exceptional care," says Kent Dettlo, Director of Residential Services. "We wouldn't be able to operate our medical group homes without our nurses and these homes are critical to allow this highly vulnerable population the opportunity to live and thrive in the community. We could not be more grateful to our nurses."

When the pandemic hit New Jersey in the spring of 2020, it significantly increased the responsibilities and stress on the nursing team throughout the agency. In addition to their other duties, the nurses had to assist with developing and implementing COVID-19 protocols to ensure the safety of program participants.

"Our nurses do an amazing job every day delivering critically needed services to our participants," said Mary Pfister, Director of Health Care Services. "But we are especially proud of the work they have done throughout the pandemic. In the face of adversity, they rose to the occasion. We truly appreciate everything they've done for our programs"



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BISHOP NAMED PILLAR CARE CEO

Pillar Care's Board of Trustees has hired David Bishop as the agency's new President and CEO. David has more than 32 years of nonprofit experience, including the last 22 years as V.P. for Development and Communications with the agency. He earned his undergraduate degree from Boston University and a Master's in Public Administration from Rutgers. He is the first CEO in the almost 70-year history of the agency to be hired internally.

David fills the vacancy created by the departure of Purna Rodman Conare, who recently left the agency after almost seven years to pursue his interest in social service advocacy. "We are grateful to Purna for his years of service and wish him the best in all of his future endeavors," said Clark Machemer, Chair of Pillar's Board of Trustees.

"Pillar is an amazing organization that has been a major part of my life for over 20 years," said David. "I am honored and excited to help lead us in the continued pursuit of our mission."



David Bishop (on right) pictured here with Pillar Board Chair Clark Machemer