



- 02 Top Workplaces 2026
- 03 Head Start Celebrations
- 04 Grant Funding News
- 06 In The Community
- 08 Success Stories
- 12 Safe House Easter Event



THE COMMUNITY

Spring
2026

Quarterly Community Newsletter

Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. and Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc.

How Weatherization Works for You

The goal of the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) is to reduce fuel consumption in eligible households through the installation of energy saving materials including insulation and health/safety measures. COI has provided the Weatherization program in Chautauqua County since 1976. Services may include the following based on the energy audit performed:

- Weather-stripping and caulking around doors and windows
- Cleaning, testing, repair/replacement of heating system and/or hot water tank
- Repair and/or replacement of primary doors and/or windows
- Insulation in the sidewalls, attic, and along basement windowsills
- Proper venting as needed
- Refrigerator replacement as allowed by regulations

COI serves an average of 70 families annually and invests an average of \$800,000 per year with the focus on single *(continued on page 3)*



Dunkirk (716) 366-8176
100825 Bennett Rd. Dunkirk, NY

Jamestown (716) 661-9430
402 Chandler St Jamestown, NY

Youth Safe House 1(888) 877-9647

Buffalo News Names Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. a Winner of the Top Workplaces 2026 Award

Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) has been awarded a Top Workplaces 2026 honor by the Buffalo News. This list is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered by employee engagement technology partner Energage LLC. The confidential survey uniquely measures the employee experience and its component themes, including employees feeling Respected & Supported, Enabled to Grow, and Empowered to Execute, to name a few.



THE BUFFALO NEWS

“Earning a Top Workplaces award is a badge of honor for companies, especially because it comes authentically from their employees,” said Eric Rubino, Energage CEO. “That’s something to be proud of. In today’s market, leaders must ensure they’re allowing employees to have a voice and be heard. That’s paramount. Top Workplaces do this, and it pays dividends.” COI is one of only five companies in the region to be named a Top Workplace in 2026.

The agency’s CEO, Diane Hewitt-Johnson, stated, “COI has been working diligently on changing the culture of our agency for the past eight years and being acknowledged as a Top Workplace for the third time shows that our efforts have been successful. I’m proud of the staff and the work we do.”

COI serves over 3,000 households annually and is a well-known resource for low- and moderate-income residents of Chautauqua County. More information on current employment offerings, as well as COI’s generous benefits, can be found on COI’s website: <https://www.chautauquaopportunities.com/employment/>

NOW HIRING!

- RN Trainer/Supervisor
- Assistant Cook
- Teachers
- Teacher Assistants
- Quality Assurance Monitor
- Early Education Mentor
- Early Childhood Quality Assessment Specialist
- Administrative Assistant
- Summer Food Kitchen Assistants
- Summer Food Delivery Drivers
- Asset Development Specialist
- Healthy Homes Program Specialist
- Administrative Assistant
- Crisis Workers
- Maintenance Laborer/Mower

To view job descriptions and apply visit: [chautauquaopportunities.com/employment](https://www.chautauquaopportunities.com/employment)

TOP WORK PLACES 2026 THE BUFFALO NEWS

How Weatherization Works for You *(continued from page 1)*

family, multi-family and manufactured housing. Weatherization provides a number of benefits to the local community:

- WAP efficiently retrofits low-income homes, greatly improving residents' utility costs and health outcomes.
- WAP offers good local jobs and training needed to secure stable private sector work.
- All materials - materials, trucks, appliances - are purchased locally.
- By updating low-income homes, WAP helps preserve the local stock of affordable housing.
- Because WAP ensures low-income homes have reasonable energy use, more utility customers are able to keep up with their bills.
- WAP reduces low income households' energy consumption.

WAP is funded with both federal and state funds. Funding for New York State's WAP is currently uncertain, as state and federal budget discussions continue. Weatherization organizations across the state are concerned about possible changes to how the funds are distributed. Reducing funding for Weatherization could significantly impact local programs, potentially leading to fewer homes served and added pressure on staffing and operations. State leader and Weatherization advocates continue to stress the importance of WAP in helping families lower utility costs, improve home safety and comfort, and maintain affordable housing.



Lions Club Donation

In January, Weatherization Assistance Program Manager Craig Rodgers and Weatherization Assistance Program Specialist Jared Strickland delivered a brief informational presentation to the Frewsburg Lions Club regarding COI's Weatherization Program. The presentation explained the program's focus as on providing insulation and air sealing along with other weatherization and energy conservation applications to help qualifying households reduce their energy expenses for the long term. The program's funding from DOE (US Department of Energy) and HEAP (Heating Energy Assistance Program) was explained as well as the oversight by New York State Homes and Community Renewal. Some of the testing equipment used in the process of evaluating a customer's residence both before and after the weatherization process was demonstrated, including a blower door, which measures how much air flows through a building. At the conclusion, the Lions Club President Donald Dove presented a donation cheque of \$50 to the program.



Head Start Celebrates Month of the Young Child and Child Abuse Prevention Month

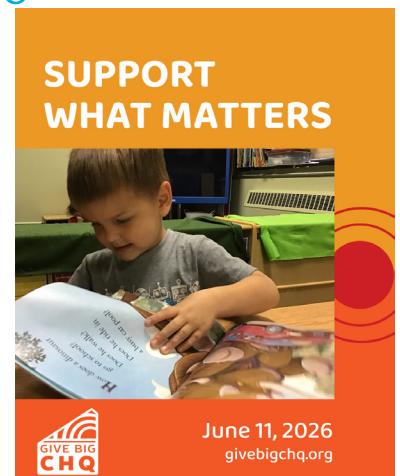
Early Care and Education staff and children came together in April to proudly celebrate the *Month of the Young Child* along with *Child Abuse Prevention Month*. In recognition of these important observances, children participated in a meaningful activity by displaying colorful pinwheels, which symbolize hope, joy, and the bright futures every child deserves. As the pinwheels spin, they serve as a reminder of our shared responsibility to nurture, protect, and support the well-being of all children in our community.



Save the Date! GiveBigCHQ June 11th, 2026

This year for GiveBigCHQ, COI will be requesting donations to help the Early Care and Education division purchase books that will be distributed to COI's Head Start and Early Head Start families.

GiveBigCHQ is a 24 hour fundraising event that connects donors to local causes they care about. The event is hosted by the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation. Visit givebigchq.org on June 11 to donate!



Grant Funding News

HUD Fair Housing Education and Outreach - COI was awarded this one year federal grant that started May 1 to distribute information about Fair Housing rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords. Information will be distributed through brochures, radio ads, and social media posts. Presentations will be made to landlords and housing providers, and people with discrimination complaints will be referred to the appropriate agencies for legal enforcement assistance.

CSBG Discretionary Grant - The NYS Department of State awarded COI funding to provide direct assistance for basic needs from May through September 2026. The Child Care Council is collaborating with Housing and Community Development to provide hygiene/household items and transportation passes to vulnerable and at-risk families and individuals. Gift cards for food, school supplies, and clothing will be distributed by Health and Family Services to homeless youth residing at the Safe House or Transitional Living apartments, and gift cards for food will be given to homeless women residing at Hope Haven. Early Care and Education will provide school supplies, diapers and wipes to families enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start, as well as child care scholarships to help families access child care to maintain employment.

Migrant and Seasonal Worker Program - COI has operated this program in Chautauqua County and southern Erie County since 2002 to engage migrant farmworkers to provide health education and connect them with health care and other services. The agency was recently awarded a five year grant (2026 - 2031) from the NYS Department of Health that will expand the program across five Western NY counties (Chautauqua Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, and Allegany). Two Migrant Outreach Specialists will carry out outreach to migrants and their families, providing case management, health information, and transportation and translation services to access health care.

NYS Empire State Development CDFI Assistance - Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc. (CODI) was recently awarded a one year grant to support training and technical assistance they provide to existing or prospective small businesses in Chautauqua County. Activities include one-on-one technical assistance, Business Essentials Training class, assistance with preparing loan applications, and presentations at outreach events.



COI Staff in Jamestown and Dunkirk showed their support for Child Abuse Prevention Month in April.

Summer Food Program



Keeping children healthy during the summer months can be a challenge for many families, especially when school is out and access to regular meals may be limited. The Summer Food Program plays a vital role in helping bridge that gap by ensuring children continue to receive nutritious meals even when school cafeterias are closed.

The Summer Food Program provides free, balanced meals to children and teens in the community, helping support their growth, energy, and overall well-being. During the summer, kids are often more active—playing outside, participating in camps, or spending time with friends—so proper nutrition is especially important. Regular access to healthy meals helps maintain energy levels, supports brain development, and strengthens immune systems.

COI's Summer Food Program is finalizing sites for 2026. To find a site near you this summer, text "FOOD" to 304-304 or call 1-866-348-6479.

The Summer Food Program is currently seeking individuals for kitchen and delivery positions. If you're looking for part-time work - or are a youth interested in gaining experience over the summer - visit www.chautauquaopportunities.com/employment/ to learn more.

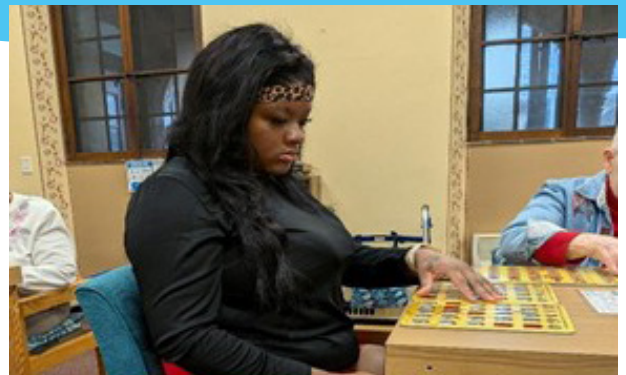
In the Community

Bingo!

On April 29th, members of COI's Youth Corps, along with staff from COI's Transitional Independent Living program, played bingo with residents of the St. Columban's on the Lake Retirement Home.

The teens had a fun time playing the game, learning about all the different types of bingos, and being competitive to try and win quarters! Their favorite part was talking to the residents and learning about them. This was the second time in two months going to spend time with their friends at St. Columban's. They always feel so welcomed and have such a good time with the ladies! A big thank you to St. Columban's for allowing the youth to spend time with them.

Youth Corps is open to any youth ages 14-21 interested in participating in monthly Youth Corps events. Call the Safe House at 716-661-9446 for more information.



Foster Grandparent reaches 100 years young

Celebrating a century of kindness, compassion, and unwavering dedication, we are overjoyed to honor Phyllis Ciminello on her 100th birthday!

For more than nine incredible years, “Grandma Phyllis,” as she was lovingly known by children, families, and staff, brightened the Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. Head Start and Early Head Start programs with her daily presence in Ange Couchman’s classroom. With a warm heart and gentle spirit, she nurtured every child she met, offering kindness, respect, and a comforting sense of family that filled the entire center. Her compassion and love left a lasting impact, making her an unforgettable part of the Foster Grandparent Program. Today, we celebrate not just 100 amazing years of life, but a legacy of care that continues to inspire us all. Happy 100th Birthday, Grandma Phyllis! 🎉💖



ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. has published its Annual Impact Report for 2025, and it includes the Annual Head Start report. This report describes how COI addresses the needs of people in Chautauqua County and highlights the impacts that COI services have had on the lives of the people we serve.

The Annual Impact Report can be found on the COI website, under Reports.



Success Stories

Housing Success - In Her Own Words



Back in 2023, I ended up pregnant. It was my first child with my boyfriend at the time. I was living with him and his family. We ended up separating in January, and I was due in February. It was terrifying, being pregnant without having a place to bring my baby home to, once she arrived.

I began calling every landlord and apartment complex I could find. I was working full time, while trying to balance my health and wellbeing, and the health and wellbeing of my child, as well as pounding the pavement trying to find a roof over my head. I didn't know what I was going to do and I was running out of time.

Then I received a call from Chautauqua Opportunities letting me know I had been pulled from their waitlist for a 2-bedroom apartment. I ended up completing the application and getting all

the paperwork in right from the hospital. When I was discharged, my newborn daughter and I got to go sign our lease to our very own apartment. Throughout the year we settled in, got everything we needed for our apartment, and then I lost my job. Without a paycheck, I was no longer able to pay my rent. Once again, I was facing the potential of not having a roof over my head for myself and my child.

My property manager worked with me and the workers down at Social Services on getting me help with the back rent, as well as monthly assistance with rent while I was job searching. I was also able to get my daughter on the waitlist for daycare through Chautauqua Opportunities as well, so that when I do start working, she will have somewhere safe to go, and I won't have to worry about her throughout the day.

I plan to start utilizing the financial services that COI offers and working on improving my credit, as I would like to own a house one day. I now know that it is possible.

I have always worked hard at bettering my circumstances, and I am so grateful that there are agencies like this that help those that really need it, especially young first-time mothers that have just had a bad string of luck but just need a helping hand and an opportunity.

First Time Car owner!

Steven enrolled in COI's Transitional Independent Living Program in April 2025 due to experiencing homelessness. Over the past year, Steven has focused on maintaining employment, saving money, and strengthening his independent living skills through attending Life Skill classes. Recently, Steven achieved a significant milestone by obtaining his driver's license and purchasing his first vehicle. Congratulations, Steven!



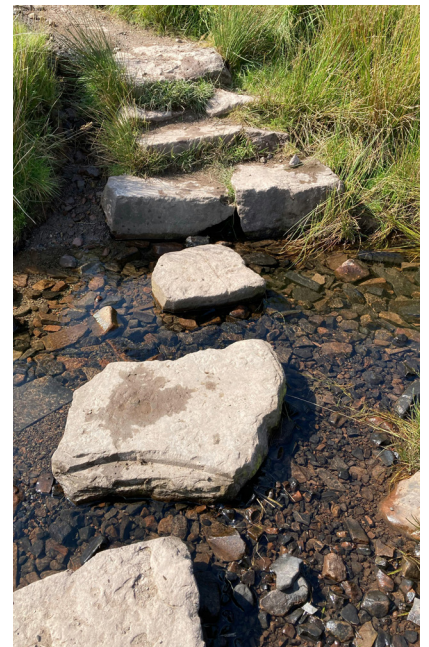
Hope Haven Success!



After LouAnn's spouse passed away, she found that she was unable to keep up with the maintenance and other responsibilities of homeownership and had no other choice but to sell the property. LouAnn rented an apartment, but the landlord did not fix issues within it, so LouAnn withheld rent and was eventually evicted. With nowhere to go, LouAnn sought help from her brother. He is not allowed to have additional people residing with him (per his lease) so he called Hope Haven looking for any assistance they could offer his sister to keep her safe and housed. He worked with the Shelter Coordinator and Chautauqua County Department of Social Services to get a referral approved so LouAnn could move into the shelter, which happened in November 2025. For several months, LouAnn worked on her goal of obtaining safe and affordable housing with the shelter staff and Jamestown Housing Authority. She was able to accomplish this goal in March, when she moved into her own apartment. COI is delighted that she was able to find affordable housing in a safe and secure building. LuAnn is pictured here after returning from her lease signing with keys in hand!

Section 8 - A Stepping Stone

Four years ago, an unhoused single woman from Cattaraugus County was referred to COI for rental assistance. Public assistance was her only source of income at that time. In August of 2022, she was approved for a HUD Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher, which allowed her to secure affordable housing. The customer expressed her interest in finding work and enrolled in vocational training courses. She obtained her first part-time job in 2023, and by August of 2024 she was holding down two part-time jobs. The employment income reduced the rental assistance from Section 8 to \$200 per month. In October of 2025, she was able to use her previous experience as an accountant to secure a lucrative job and her Section 8 payment status was certified as zero housing assistance. After a 6-month grace period, she was still self-sufficient and her participation in Section 8 was officially ended. This is a prime example of how assistance can be used as a stepping stone toward housing security and financial stability.



Sara's Journey of Resilience

Sara Perez Del Rio joined COI's Head Start Home-based program in September 2024 with her son, Zuriel. Shortly after Zuriel turned one, she learned she was pregnant with her daughter, Sulianys. Sara remained actively engaged throughout her pregnancy and welcomed a healthy baby girl in March, 2025. Following Sulianys' birth, she enrolled her in the program as well.

Throughout 2025, Sara navigated significant challenges, including moving between family members' homes for several months. Despite this instability, she remained deeply committed to her children's learning, consistently meeting with her Family Educator—even when visits needed to take place in public settings such as the library.

Determined to support Zuriel's development, Sara enrolled him in a center-based classroom in November 2025 so he could benefit from interacting with peers. During this time, Zuriel received a speech evaluation and was identified as needing speech services. When transportation became a barrier, Sara transitioned him back to the Home-based program while ensuring his speech services continued without interruption.

That same month, Sara learned she was expecting her third child and, shortly thereafter, experienced homelessness. The family was placed in temporary hotel housing through the County Department of Social Services. Even amid these challenges, Sara worked closely with COI staff to secure permanent housing. In February 2026, she reached a major milestone, moving into a three-bedroom apartment for her family.

Despite housing instability, transportation barriers, and the demands of pregnancy, Sara has remained resilient and dedicated. She continues to engage with COI's services as she works toward self-sufficiency and a brighter future for her children.



Now Accepting Children

2026-2027

Sites:

Early Learning Opportunities

Brocton, Bush, Central Ave

and North Main



CODI Success: H & H Finds Children's Consignment Store



Kendall connected with Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc. (CODI) to learn more about opening a children's consignment store. She scheduled a meeting with a Business Development Specialist to get answers to her questions about starting her business and to better understand the process.

Kendall was soon exploring retail space and finalizing her business concept. She moved forward with opening H&H Finds Children's Consignment Store in downtown Jamestown.

H&H Finds offers a selection of new and gently used children's clothing, toys, and baby equipment, including items such as high-chairs and pack-and-plays. The store provides an affordable option for local families while also giving quality items a second life.

CODI is pleased to have supported Kendall during the early stages of planning and wish her continued success as her business grows in the Jamestown community.



Mr. Bunny visits Safe House

The Safe House of Chautauqua County was once again visited by Mr. Bunny, bringing delight and treats to the families that came to the Safe House's Easter Event. The Youth Corps was on hand to play games, help out with crafts, provide sweet treats and hand out everything needed to grow flowers!



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc

Diane Hewitt-Johnson,
Chief Executive Officer

Judy Yonkers,
Director of Grants and Systems Compliance

Dan Mets,
Director of IT and Central Services

Melissa Sanden,
Human Resources Manager

Housing and Community Development

Amanda Straight, Director

- Foreclosure Prevention
- Homebuyer Education
- Homeless Prevention & Rehousing
- Housing Rehabilitation
- Lead Remediation
- Tenant Services
- Weatherization

Early Care and Education

Bill Vogt, Director

- Early Head Start
- Head Start
- Universal Pre-K





Child Care Council
Susan Marker, Director

Child Care Resource and Referral
 Legally Exempt
 Training
 Family Court Child Care
 USDA Summer Food Services Program

Health and Family Services
Chris Nicosia, Director

Licensed Home Care
 Mobile Crisis Outreach
 Migrant Health Outreach
 Runaway & Homeless Youth Shelter
 Transitional Independent Living Program
 Hope Haven Women's Shelter

Economic Development
Michael Michalski,
Sr. Accounting Manager

Entrepreneurial Technical Assistance
 Small Business Essentials Training
 Small Business Lending
 Incubator Space
 Consumer Appliance Loans



Pictured are Chris Nicosia, Health and Family Services Director, and Youth Services staff Sydney White, Cathy Szukala, Luke Macakanja, Kirsten Morales, Mr. Bunny (Alex Woleen), Kimberly Salerno, and Ashley Kubis, Residential Services Manager



JOIN CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES INC FOR

Community Conversations

Presentation by FSCR,
Family Service of the Chautauqua Region

Save the date:
Thursday
May 14, 2026
5:00pm-6:00pm



Participants also
have a chance to win
one of
4- \$50.00
Shop Chautauqua gift
certificates.
Raffle winners
chosen at random

If you are enrolled in Medicaid and you or your family are seeking support with food, transportation, or housing, there may be help available. Join us for this informational meeting to find out how.



Scan the QR code to join!



ÚNASE A CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES INC. PARA

Conversaciones Comunitarias

Presentación a cargo de FSCR,
Servicio Familiar de la Región de Chautauqua

Reserva la fecha:
Jueves
14 de mayo de 2026
5:00 p. m. – 6:00 p. m.



Los participantes también
tienen la oportunidad de
ganar uno de los
4 certificados de regalo de
\$50.00
de Shop Chautauqua.
Los ganadores del sorteo
serán seleccionados al azar.

Si está inscrito en Medicaid y usted o su familia necesitan apoyo con alimentación, transportación o vivienda, es posible que haya ayuda disponible. Acompáñenos a esta reunión informativa para averiguar cómo obtenerla.



¡Escanea el código QR para unirte!



www.chautauquaopportunities.com



@chautauquaopportunities



@chautopp



@chautopp

Upcoming Events

MAY 14 2026
Community
Conversations
Virtual Meeting
5pm - 7pm

MAY 25, 2026
Memorial Day
OFFICES CLOSED

JUNE 19TH, 2026
Juneteenth
OFFICES CLOSED

MAY 20, 2026
Section 8 Wait list Sign
up - Jamestown, NY
8:30am - 4:30pm

MAY 29, 2026
Section 8 Wait list Sign
up - Dunkirk, NY
8:30am - 4:30pm

JULY 3, 2026
Independence Day
OFFICES CLOSED

Contact Us

For all general inquiries, please contact :

Michael Yerico Administration Building
17 W. Courtney St
Dunkirk, NY 14048
(716) 366-3333
info@chautopp.org