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THE COMMUNITY

Summer
2026

Quarterly Community Newsletter

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

Caring Beyond Limits

In 2025, Chautauqua Opportunities Inc. (COI) and the YWCA Jamestown were awarded funding from the Women's Giving Circle with the goal of expanding access to childcare by supporting providers who serve children with diverse developmental and behavioral needs. When the Caring Beyond Limits Grant began, the goal of COI's Child Care Council was to provide early childhood educators with backpacks full of materials, along with classroom resources and coaching, that would support children's social-emotional development. The initiative quickly became much more - an opportunity to build meaningful relationships that strengthen the local early childhood community.

Twenty-one early childhood programs partnered with the Child Care Council through the grant, serving approximately 164 children across Chautauqua County. Through individualized coaching, classroom consultations, and ongoing conversations, providers were able to implement social-emotional strategies that *(continued on page 3)*



Dunkirk (716) 366-8176
10825 Bennett Rd. Dunkirk, NY

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

Youth Safe House 1(888) 877-9647

COI Begins Development of 2027-2029 Strategic Plan

The Clarion Hotel Conference Center in Dunkirk provided the setting for COI's annual Board of Directors Retreat, which included a comprehensive planning session for the agency's 2027-2029 Strategic Plan. COI develops a new Strategic Plan every three years, with progress toward the goals and objectives in the approved plan reviewed quarterly.

Draft goals for the new plan were developed using feedback from a community survey and interviews with key stakeholders conducted by Kee Concepts Consulting, which also facilitated the planning session. COI's management team joined the Board of Directors to refine the proposed goals and identify activities and strategies to help achieve them.

Feedback from the community survey indicated that responders feel that COI is serving the community well, reaching the people who need its services, and providing valuable programs and supports. Respondents encouraged COI to continue addressing housing, childcare, and basic needs while expanding services for vulnerable populations.

Financial pressures emerged as the most frequently identified community challenges.



Many respondents described experiencing financial strain despite being employed or having incomes above the eligibility limits for traditional assistance programs. Stakeholders who were interviewed identified housing and early childhood services as two of COI's greatest opportunities for community impact, while also recognizing that complex challenges require strong partnerships and community-wide solutions.

Looking ahead, stakeholders anticipate that community needs will continue to grow as rising costs and economic pressures affect local households. They also expressed concern about funding uncertainty and potential policy changes that could reduce the resources available to address these needs.

COI expects to complete and adopt its 2027-2029 Strategic Plan early next year. The plan will provide a roadmap for the agency's priorities and activities over the next three years, ensuring that COI's work continues to reflect the needs of the communities it serves.

Caring Beyond Limits *(continued)*

(continued from page 1) support children both at home and in the classroom. Thirty-nine social-emotional backpacks gave families practical tools to continue learning beyond the classroom, while classroom materials helped teachers intentionally create environments that fostered emotional regulation, problem-solving, and positive peer interactions.

One of the greatest successes was not measured by the number of materials distributed or hours of coaching provided, but by the trust that developed throughout the process. Providers who initially viewed the grant as simply funding for materials began reaching out for guidance, sharing classroom challenges, and asking for additional support. Mentors were no longer viewed as outside entities, they became partners. Those stronger relationships led to more meaningful coaching, greater confidence among educators, and better outcomes for children.

As educators became more comfortable using the materials, they expanded on the original ideas in creative ways. Several programs transformed the grant resources into classroom “Busy Boxes” that children could access during transitions or challenging moments throughout the day. These simple additions not only supported individual children but also strengthened classroom communities by encouraging positive interactions between teachers and children while creating calmer, more engaging learning environments.

This approach strengthens relationships between providers and the Child Care Council, builds educators’ confidence, creates stronger connections between teachers and children, and ultimately supports healthier, more responsive learning environments throughout the community.

Chautauqua Opportunities

NOW HIRING!

- RN Trainer/Supervisor
- Teachers
- Teacher Assistants
- Quality Assurance Monitor
- Early Education Mentor
- Early Childhood Quality Assessment Specialist
- Administrative Assistant
- Food Service Worker
- Housing Case Worker
- Healthy Homes Program Specialist
- Crisis Workers
- Maintenance Laborer/Mower
- Center Director 2
- Youth Specialist
- Weatherization Laborer

TOP WORK PLACES 2026

THE BUFFALO NEWS

To view job descriptions and apply visit:
chautauquaopportunities.com/employment

Community Bank, N.A. Donation

The Dunkirk branch of Community Bank, NA recently provided a donation to Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc. (CODI) to support the organization's economic development activities. The funding was made possible through Community Bank's membership in the Federal Home Loan Bank of NY.

The \$2,500 donation will be used toward the provision of training and technical assistance for small businesses. CODI operates as the economic development arm of Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI). The organization assists entrepreneurs with starting or growing a small business through a Small Business Essentials Training class and one-on-one technical assistance. Businesses may apply to CODI for loans or grants for startup or expansion when available. CODI also offers a Home Appliance Loan Program that provides small dollar loans for consumers to purchase appliances such as refrigerators, washers, and dryers. Interested individuals should call 716-661-9430, extension 2298.



Pictured are Diane Hewitt-Johnson, CEO of CODI and COI; Jason DeChard, Community Bank District Manager; Jena Willebrandt, Community Bank Branch Manager, and Michael Michalski, Senior Accounting Manager and Director of CODI.

Grant Funding News

Chautauqua Region Community Foundation Community Impact Grant: COI was awarded funding to supplement its USDA Summer Food Service Program that prepares and delivers breakfasts, lunches and snacks to children over the summer months. Meals are transported to recreation programs, schools, libraries and other places where children gather and distributed free of charge. CRCF funding assists the program by covering transportation costs associated with meal delivery in the southern end of Chautauqua County.

No Kid Hungry: Funds provided by No Kid Hungry were used to purchase a used cargo van for Summer Food Service Program meal deliveries. The purchase eliminates the need for annual van rentals, reducing long-term transportation costs. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national organization with a mission to end childhood hunger and poverty.

Brocton Central School 3PK: COI was awarded funding to continue to provide Universal Pre-K services for three-year-old children in the Brocton Central School District over the next three years. COI has partnered with the Brocton School District for this program since the 2020-2021 school year.

Youth Corps Gives Back at Audubon Community Nature Center

In July, seven members of COI's Youth Corps and two staff members spent a beautiful—and very hot—afternoon volunteering at the Audubon Community Nature Center in Jamestown. The youth worked hard for nearly three hours, using shovels and hoes to remove overgrown grass, spreading fresh mulch, and trimming branches and plants along the trails.

The afternoon was about more than just hard work. The youth enjoyed riding in the back of a trailer pulled by a tractor as an Audubon guide shared interesting facts about the Nature Center, local wildlife, and the plants and animals that call the area home. They also learned about different types of poison ivy and how to recognize and avoid it!

For some of the youth, the visit brought back fond memories of childhood field trips to the Nature Center, while others were visiting for the first time. After completing their work, the group toured the Nature Center and enjoyed seeing the animals and exhibits. The youth had a wonderful time, with several commenting that the experience was one of their favorite Youth Corps activities.

Many thanks to Audubon Community Nature Center for welcoming COI's Youth Corps and providing this opportunity for young people to give back to their community. COI's Youth Corps projects provide youth with opportunities to make a positive impact through community service while developing teamwork, leadership, and job-readiness skills.

Youth ages 14 to 21 who are interested in participating in monthly Youth Corps projects can call COI's Safe House at 716-661-9446.



In the Community

Outreach At Large

Staff from COI's Head Start, Child Care Council and Weatherization programs have been out at various events and farmers markets across the county. Families who attended were able to gather information on local services.

If your organization would like to have a COI table at your event, call (716) 366-8176 ext. 1246 and let us know!



Youth Corps helps out at the Safety Village

On June 30th, 5 Youth from COI Youth Corps and two COI staff helped landscape at the Safety Village in Ashville, NY. Youth Corps members weeded the areas, removed the old mulch, replaced plant matting and put down new mulch. It was a very hot, sunny day, full of cold water breaks. Our youth worked incredibly hard! They were given a tour of the Safety Village and many hadn't been there since they were very young. The youth were treated to cold drinks at 7/11 to cool off when the job was finished. Thank you to the Safety Village for allowing us to come serve the community!

Youth Corps Events are held to provide a service to the public and give our youth a chance to give back to the community that has given so much to so many. If you know of a youth or are a youth between the ages of 14 and 21 who would like to participate in our monthly Youth Corps Events, please call the Safe House at 716-661-9446 for more information.



Jacob - Successful TILP Graduate

Jacob Sanders has been in COI's Transitional Independent Living Program (TILP) since August of 2025. While in the program, Jacob maintained very good grades at Jamestown High School and participated in leadership classes, all while holding a part time job. He graduated in June and will be celebrated along with other graduating TILP participants with a picnic in August. Jacob can be considered a model TILP participant for the passion and perseverance that are helping him reach his goals. He will attend Jamestown Community College in the Fall, majoring in Marine Biology while living on campus. Congratulations, Jacob! We are very proud of all your accomplishments!



Success Stories

Through a Parents' Eyes



To many people, this picture may seem like an ordinary milestone. To Jayden's support system, however, it represents something extraordinary. It is a symbol of perseverance, determination, and the unwavering support that helped him overcome significant challenges.

In January 2022, Jayden was evaluated for Early Intervention services by a team of doctors and therapists. Because of the circumstances surrounding his birth and the difficulties his tiny body faced during his first months of life, he experienced numerous developmental challenges. His foster family (who later became his adoptive family) will never forget being told that he would likely not crawl, let alone walk, before the age of one. At that moment, it became clear that he would need all the love, encouragement, and support possible.

Following the evaluation, Jayden was diagnosed with severe developmental delays and immediately qualified for Early Intervention services. Therapy began within a week. Three times each week, his caregiver and aunt worked alongside his physical and occupational therapist in their living room, dedicating 45-minute sessions to helping him develop essential skills.

In March 2023, after his primary caregiver had returned to work, Jayden began attending the Early Head Start program, where his dedicated teachers worked closely with therapists to continue supporting his development and his caregiver's employment. It was *(continued on next page)*

Hanan - Successful TILP Graduate

Hanan came to COI's Transitional Independent Living Program as a homeless youth still attending high school. She was seeking support and guidance to help her stay on track with her education and achieve her goal of graduating.

Throughout her time in the program, Hanan actively participated in life skills lessons and maintained excellent school attendance, never missing a day. The staff provided encouragement, academic support, and guidance that helped her stay focused on her goals, including pursuing higher education.

Recently, Hanan not only graduated high school, but finished among the top ten students in her class! In the fall, she plans to attend Cortland University to continue pursuing her future career goals.

Hanan's determination, hard work, and commitment to her education serve as an inspiration to others.



Through a Parents' Eyes - *continued*

(continued from previous page) there that he began talking. In fact, he occasionally spoke in both English and Spanish, astonishing his speech therapist, who remarked on how incredible it was that he was communicating in two languages.

Jayden was blessed with an exceptional support system at the center. The kitchen staff greeted him warmly each morning, helping him feel welcomed and valued. Support staff were always available when he needed extra comfort or reassurance, and they consistently encouraged his family during difficult moments. Teachers throughout the building offered unwavering support and celebrated his progress. The Center Director became a strong advocate for Jayden, working tirelessly to ensure he received the services and opportunities he needed to succeed. His family remains deeply grateful for everything the staff did to help him reach his goals.

When Jayden graduated from Early Head Start and transitioned to a new program, his family quickly realized just how valuable the support and guidance they had received had been. They were connected with a COI Family Educator who visited weekly, providing both Jayden and his parents the encouragement, resources, and guidance they needed as he continued to grow and thrive.

COI's staff members were at each of Jayden's Early Intervention and IEP meetings. They fought tirelessly for the services Jayden needed, and never stopped believing in his potential. Their dedication played a vital role in helping him become the child he is today. They not only advocated for Jayden but also taught his family how to advocate effectively for him. Their constant reminder - "You know your child best" - became a source of strength and confidence throughout the journey.

Today, Jayden's family is filled with gratitude for everyone who played a role in his success: family members, friends, Early Head Start classroom staff, management, therapists, and advocates. Thanks to their collective support, encouragement, and belief in him, Jayden is heading to kindergarten this fall in a general education classroom — a milestone that once seemed uncertain but now stands as a testament to his incredible determination and the village that helped him get there.

Original version posted to Facebook by the parent.

Housing Staff Receive Certifications

Congratulations to Zoey Luna, Housing Caseworker, and Barbara Martin, Housing Clerk, for obtaining their Housing Choice Voucher Specialist Certifications! We sincerely appreciate the hard work and dedication each of you brings to our agency. Your commitment to our mission and the communities we serve is recognized and valued.



A Determination to Succeed



Sarah first came to COI exhausted, overwhelmed, and unsure of where to turn. As a single mother of two young children, ages six and nine, she had recently lost her housing after experiencing financial hardship and an unexpected job loss. For several months, the family moved between friends' homes, temporary shelters, and motel rooms whenever assistance was available.

Sarah worried constantly about where her children would sleep each night, and their school attendance began to suffer. She felt discouraged and isolated. Determined to create a better future for her family, Sarah contacted COI for help. She was connected with a Housing Case Worker who worked closely with her to assess her family's needs and develop a housing plan. The worker helped Sarah navigate housing applications, identify affordable rental opportunities, and connect with community resources. Together, they reviewed her budget and addressed the barriers to securing stable housing.

Throughout the process, the Case Worker provided encouragement and guidance, helping Sarah stay focused on her goals even when setbacks occurred. Sarah actively participated in every step of the housing search. As she gained confidence, she began to see herself not as someone experiencing homelessness, but as a capable mother, building a new future for her children.

After several months of hard work and persistence, Sarah achieved a major milestone: she secured safe, affordable housing in a family-friendly neighborhood. Her family finally had a permanent home.

The impact extended far beyond obtaining an apartment. Sarah's children now have their own beds, a quiet place to complete homework, and the stability needed to thrive in school. The family has established routines, built relationships, and is more connected to their community. Sarah was also able to secure steady employment and begin setting financial goals for the future.

Congrats to COI's ROMA Certified Implementers



Congratulations to Valerie Stock, Systems Compliance Coordinator, Diane Hewitt-Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, and Amanda Straight, Housing and Community Development for completing renewal requirements as Certified ROMA Implementers, a professional designation within the Community Action network. ROMA (Results Oriented Management and Accountability) provides a framework for the agency's continuous growth and improvement designed to preserve the anti-poverty focus of community action. Implementers ensure that the ROMA framework is incorporated into agency activities and procedures.

Annual Child Care Provider Appreciation Dinner

On May 1, the Chautauqua Child Care Council hosted its Annual Provider Appreciation Dinner to recognize the child care providers who serve families throughout Chautauqua County. This year's casino-themed dinner brought together nearly 50 providers for an evening of good food, games, prizes, and time to enjoy each other's company.

Providing child care is not an easy job. It takes patience, flexibility, and a genuine commitment to helping children learn and grow. Every day, providers support working families by creating safe, caring environments where children can thrive. Their work often happens behind the scenes, but its impact is felt throughout our community.

The Provider Appreciation Dinner is one small way to thank these dedicated professionals for everything they do. COI appreciates the care they provide, the relationships they build with families, and the important role they play in supporting our local workforce.

To all the child care providers, thank you! Your dedication truly helps keep Chautauqua County working.

More images from the Child Care Appreciation Dinner can be found on pages 12 and 13.



Child Care Council's Provider Appreciation Day



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



Front Row: Lindsey Burke, Rebecca Potter, Susan Marker, Director of the Child Care Council, Michelle Levin and Chris Wigren

Back Row: Yanira Santiago, Keira Velez Cortes, Patti Dudenhoeffer, Desary Brown, Lisa Feldt, Megan Rodgers, Beth Faulkner, Rena Lydic, Lori Steward, Becky Reed, Lori Gould

CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES, INC. Community Conversations

Virtual Meeting

August 13, 2026 at 5 PM



Join us to learn more about
Indoor Air Quality



Guest Speaker:
Lisa Schmidtfrerick-Miller

**Indoor Air Quality- The ABC's of IAQ: Let's explore
a few facts, myths and ideas that might help you
and your family breathe a little easier.**

JOIN US FOR A CHANCE
TO WIN ONE OF THREE
\$80 GIFT CARDS!



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Upcoming Events

AUGUST 13, 2026
Community
Conversations
Virtual Meeting
5pm - 7pm

AUGUST 19, 2026
Section 8 Wait list Sign
up - Jamestown, NY
8:30am - 4:30pm

AUGUST 21, 2026
COI Staff Development
Day
OFFICES CLOSED

AUGUST 28, 2026
Section 8 Wait list Sign
up - Dunkirk, NY
8:30am - 4:30pm

SEPTEMBER 7, 2026
Labor Day
OFFICES CLOSED

OCTOBER, 2026
Columbus/Indigenous
Day
OFFICES CLOSED

Contact Us

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