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THE COMMUNITY

Fall 2026

Quarterly Community Newsletter
Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. and Chautauqua Opportunities for Development, Inc.

COI Employees Gather for Annual Staff Development Day



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) held its annual Staff Development Day at Chautauqua Suites on August 21, bringing employees from across the organization together for a full day of professional development, learning, and recognition. The event also celebrated employees who reached significant years-of-service milestones.

The day began with a presentation by best-selling author and professional speaker Arel Moodie, titled "The Hidden Cost of Misalignment," followed by "Align Method – Tools and Practice." The ALIGN Framework identifies four stages of operation—strategic, tactical, cultural, and personal—and helps individuals recognize how approaching challenges from different perspectives can lead to misalignment.

Participants found the presentations engaging and informative. One employee shared, "I liked how the presentation clearly connected misalignment to its impact on communication, productivity, and overall organizational effectiveness. It was a good reminder that even small disconnects can create larger challenges, and that alignment across teams is essential." *(con't on page 3)*

Weatherization Manager Appointed to Policy Advisory Council



COI's Housing & Community Development division is pleased to congratulate Craig Rodgers on his appointment to the New York State Homes and Community Renewal Policy Advisory Council (PAC)!

The PAC plays an important role in the development and implementation of New York State's Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), providing guidance and expertise on issues affecting low-income households across the state. Council members represent organizations serving low-income individuals and families and bring valuable technical knowledge and real-world experience to the table.

The PAC also reviews the State Plan before it is submitted to the U.S. Department of Energy for approval, helping ensure that the program continues to meet the needs of New Yorkers.

Craig Rodgers was hired as COI's Construction Manager in 2019, following 1 1/2 years of employment as an Energy Auditor. Craig has extensive knowledge in weatherization and energy efficiency, and has achieved several certifications in the field, including: HVAC Technician; Lead Abatement Supervisor; Lead Renovation, Repair, and Painting; BPI Energy Auditor; and BPI AC & Heat Pump Professional.

Craig's appointment is a wonderful recognition of his experience and commitment to helping individuals and families throughout Chautauqua County. Congratulations, Craig, on this well-deserved appointment!



COI Employees Gather for Annual Staff Development Day *(con't)*

Moodie, who also hosts Family Reboot on Disney+, is passionate about sharing the principles of Adult Development Theory. This approach explores why people make the choices they do and how understanding different perspectives can help people connect and work more effectively together.

In the afternoon, each employee participated in one of four breakout sessions tailored to their professional interests and responsibilities. Bill Vogt, COI's Director of Early Care and Education, presented "Professional Development Tied to ALIGN," exploring tools and strategies to support career growth. Early childhood education staff also had the opportunity to attend "Early Childhood Mathematics," presented by trainer Kathy Gaffney.

COI Intensive Services Coordinator Melody DeJohn, LCSW-R, led "De-Escalation Techniques," an interactive session focused on strategies for safely and effectively diffusing volatile situations.



Katrina Jones, a trainer from Jamestown Community College, presented on emotional intelligence, introducing participants to its four core components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The session also explored practical skills for managing emotions, responding empathetically, handling stress, and navigating conflict.

Beyond professional development, Staff Development Day offers a valuable opportunity for COI employees who work in locations throughout Chautauqua County to connect with colleagues, exchange ideas, and strengthen relationships across the organization. The annual event reinforces COI's commitment to continuous learning, collaboration, and the professional growth of its employees.

Years of Service

5 Years of Service

Adamides Ramos, Kylie Perrin, Amber Martenson, Marissa Bonafede, Cassandra Galen, Yanira Santiago, Stephanie Velzy, Melanie Wielgasz, Marge Ondreako, Nicole Moricca, Jennifer Matos, Chris Olson, Rob Smith, and Lori Steward

10 Years of Service

Ashley Kubis, Samantha Frew, Evie Moreland, Jennifer Bittner and Zuleika Torres Tapia

15 Years of Service

Ann Bell, Eloy Bautista, Isamar Mercado, Karen Oldenburg, and Stephanie Thompson

20 Years of Service

Gail Puffer and Heidi Counchenour

25 Years of Service

Nancy Torres, Mike Gugino and Tina Barbalato

30 Years of Service

Marisol Beauchamp and Dina Logan

50 Years of Service

Diane Salvo



Outreach Efforts Presented at Annual Conference



On September 18, 2026, COI's Weatherization Assistance Program Specialist Jared Strickland presented at the annual conference of the New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) in Niagara Falls, New York. Jared's presentation focused on the outreach efforts employed by COI's Weatherization Assistance Program. The audience consisted of executive directors, Weatherization program directors, and other staff members from Community Action Agencies throughout the state, as well as representatives of New York State Homes and Community Renewal.

Jared's outreach includes participation in community events throughout the county to make the public aware of the program, as well as presentations to other service organizations. In addition to face-to-face engagement and distribution of printed materials, social media posts help to spread the word about the program's availability. Jared provided examples of how the data he collects from both in-person events and social media engagement is used to track the effectiveness of outreach. Since June 2025, Jared has attended 77 outreach events, which yielded 154 direct referrals. Of the 154 referred households, 63 completed an intake, 19 returned the NY State Weatherization application, and 11 have been approved for the program. The number of households on the program's waitlist has also increased substantially.



Eligibility for the program is open to both homeowners and renters, with income guidelines that are based on those for the HEAP program. As an example, a family of four meets the income requirement if their monthly household income is not above $6,852. The building's annual electric and heating usage are used to measure the effectiveness of the weatherization work.



COI has operated the Weatherization Assistance Program in Chautauqua County since 1977. Qualified staff determine the specialized techniques necessary to effectively weatherize a structure, reduce fuel consumption, and make the dwelling more comfortable to live in. COI has recently completed weatherization work on a 24-unit senior complex. The program is in the planning stages of project to weatherize a 100-unit complex to be completed over the next 3 to 4 years.

Grant Funding News



Through a discretionary grant from the New York State Department of State, Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) provided essential items and services to families and individuals facing financial hardship. The $40,000 Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) supported initiatives across four COI service divisions, helping vulnerable individuals and families access basic necessities, including household and hygiene supplies, childcare scholarships, school supplies, and transportation assistance.

Grant funds provided the following support to individuals and families:

- 112 households received backpacks filled with essential hygiene and household supplies. These items were targeted to women, men, and families experiencing homelessness or housing instability.
- 84 families enrolled in COI's early education services were provided with diapers and baby wipes to help meet the needs of their young children.
- 28 families received summer childcare scholarships to help them maintain employment while ensuring their children had access to care.
- 43 Head Start graduates were provided with backpacks full of school supplies to support their transition to kindergarten.
- CHQ Transit bus passes were provided to 41 individuals to support transportation to work, school, shopping, and appointments.
- 25 youth enrolled in COI's residential services for runaway and homeless youth received gift cards to purchase clothing, food and school supplies.
- 25 women moving from Hope Haven Women's Shelter to permanent housing received gift cards for food to help ease the financial challenges of establishing a new home.



These resources provided meaningful assistance to individuals and families working to achieve greater stability and self-sufficiency, while helping address immediate needs that can otherwise create barriers to long-term success.



farm market

A Program of FeedMore wny

love fresh fruits and veggies?

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!

Stop by to purchase fresh, healthy, affordable and locally grown produce, everything under $5!



Chautauqua Opportunities
17 W Courtney Street
Dunkirk, NY 14048



11/12, 12/10

11:00am-12:00pm





The Farm Market accepts cash, debit/credit, tap to pay & SNAP/EBT (50% off)!

FeedMore wny

Find our full schedule at feedmorewny.org under 'Find Food'

FeedMore WNY
www.feedmorewny.org
(716) 822-2002

Child Care Providers Learn About CACFP Through Murder Mystery

Staff of COI's Child Care Council took a creative approach to training child care providers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) by hosting a murder mystery titled "Who Killed the Gingerbread Man?" CACFP provides reimbursement for nutritious meals served in child care programs. Complete with an inflatable gingerbread man as the victim, staff enthusiastically acted out various roles while providers worked together to solve the mystery. Behind all the fun was an important learning opportunity focused on CACFP meal patterns, infant meal menu samples, and the Infant Feeding Statement. The team found a unique way to make required training interactive, memorable, and enjoyable for everyone involved. The staff did an amazing job planning and bringing the mystery to life. It was wonderful to see their creativity, teamwork, and willingness to step outside their comfort zones. The training brought fun and laughter to an engaging learning experience. Great job, CACFP team, for thinking outside the box!



CCC Staff members Rena Lydic, Meg Rodgers and Lindsey Burke stand over a deflated gingerbread man.

In the Community

The Importance of Outreach

Over the past several months, COI's Outreach staff have been participating in events and farmers markets in both North and South county. By attending events, staff are able to meet local residents and build relationships with other community organizations.

Whether sharing information about housing assistance, home rehabilitation and energy programs, child care assistance, or other available resources, they help individuals understand their options and navigate the application process.

Their work goes beyond simply distributing information. Outreach Specialists listen to community members, learn about their challenges, answer questions, and connect individuals with the appropriate COI programs or other community agencies. These conversations also provide valuable insight into emerging community needs and help COI better understand how to serve local residents.



Child Care Council and Head Start staff at the Safety Village's Halloween event. Photo courtesy of the Safety Village.

Youth Corps Visits Fire Station



In September, seven members of COI's Youth Corps and the Youth Site Leader made a visit to the Jamestown Fire Department. The youth were able to explore the fire trucks and emergency vehicles, and also received a tour of the firehouse. During the visit, they learned about the firefighters' daily routines and the various tools and equipment they use during emergencies.

The firefighters took the time to tour the facility with the youth and answer all of their questions, even though some responded to calls during the visit. The teens were engaged throughout the visit, and one expressed interest in possibly pursuing a career as a firefighter in the future!



As a small thank-you, the youth brought homemade cookies for the firefighters to show their appreciation for everything they do to keep the community safe. Thank you to the Jamestown Fire Department for the tour, the knowledge you shared, and a fun experience! We truly appreciate all that you do for our community.

Any youth ages 14-21 who is interested in volunteering and serving the community can join Youth Corps by calling the Safe House at 716-664-9446.

Determination Leads to Success at Hope Haven



At 22, Brittany came to Hope Haven Women's Shelter after seeking emergency housing through the Chautauqua County Department of Social Services. With support from Hope Haven staff and community partners, she worked each day to overcome barriers and reach her goals. Hope Haven provided a stable, supportive environment where Brittany could meet with service providers and obtain community resources. In less than two months, Brittany obtained her ID, secured part-time employment at a local retailer, and moved into her own apartment. She also received assistance with work clothing, transportation, and a rental subsidy to help keep her new home affordable.

Brittany's determination and ambition, combined with community resources and support, have helped set her up for success. Congratulations, Brittany! We are so proud of all you've accomplished and wish you the very best in your new chapter!

Success Stories

Children Positioned for Educational Success, Thanks to Head Start

When the Armend family enrolled their oldest son in Early Head Start in 2019, they began a six-year journey with their two boys that helped prepare them for success in public school. Throughout their time in the program, the parents developed strong relationships with their children's teachers and other Head Start staff. These partnerships provided the family with guidance, resources, and the confidence to become strong advocates for their children's needs.



As the boys grew, Head Start staff worked closely with the parents to support their development and prepare them for the transition to public school. During this time, the family recognized that their older son needed additional support to be successful in the classroom. With guidance from Head Start staff, the parents learned more about the special education process, how to communicate their concerns, and how to advocate for the services and supports their son needed.

Head Start staff helped the parents understand the importance of sharing their observations, asking questions, and working collaboratively with school personnel to ensure their son received appropriate educational support. Through these experiences, the parents gained the knowledge and confidence to participate meaningfully in discussions about their son's development and educational needs. They became better equipped to navigate the special education process and advocate for services that would help him succeed.

Both boys spent four years in Early Head Start and Head Start, benefiting from nurturing relationships, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and individualized support. The partnership between the parents and program staff helped ensure that both children were prepared to make the transition to kindergarten. Today, the boys have successfully transitioned to public school, and their family is better prepared to continue advocating for their educational success.



Consistency is Key to Success



Amari enrolled in early education services with Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. at just 22 months old. From the beginning, his teachers surrounded him with support and encouragement, helping him grow and develop in a nurturing environment. Amari later transitioned from Head Start to a Universal Pre-K classroom in a different building for the 2025 school year, which was a major adjustment for him.

At first, Amari had a difficult time remaining in the classroom and staying at school. Staff knew that with the right support, consistency and strong partnership with his family, Amari could be successful. A plan was developed with his family that focused on his unique individual needs. Through continuous communication, school support, and consistent effort from everyone involved, Amari began to feel safe, comfortable, and confident at school.

Today, Amari has made incredible progress and has grown into a child who truly loves going to school! Watching his confidence and excitement grow has been incredibly rewarding. His teachers are so proud of how far Amari has come and of all that he has accomplished!

From Homelessness to a Stable Home: A Family's Journey to Housing Stability

In April of 2026, a single mother and her three children came to COI looking for help, as the family was homeless and searching for a safe and stable home. The family was placed into one of COI's emergency houses in Jamestown, which provided a safe place to stay while staff continued working alongside the family to identify a permanent housing solution.

The process often felt overwhelming for the single mother. At one point, she believed she had found a promising housing opportunity that could provide the stability her family needed. Unfortunately, that opportunity did not work out. Rather than giving up, she continued working with COI staff to explore other options. Through continued housing searches and advocacy, an apartment was identified that promised to be a good fit for her and her family. COI worked closely with the Chautauqua County Department of Social Services and the landlord to coordinate the necessary steps and ensure everything was in place for a September 1st move-in.

The family has now moved into the new apartment with subsidy assistance from the Rental Supplement Program. After experiencing the uncertainty of homelessness and the disappointment of a housing opportunity falling through, they now have a place they can call home. This success represents more than just securing an apartment—it represents stability, perseverance, and a new beginning. Through the collaboration of the client, the COI team and the landlord, the family has taken an important step toward a more stable and hopeful future.

Customer Secures Housing to Help Rebuild His Life



For many years, James experienced periods of homelessness and struggled to find lasting stability. His most recent experience with homelessness in March brought him to Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI), where he was seeking help to rebuild his life. James shared that he had been living with mental health challenges for several years, which made navigating homelessness and finding stable housing even more difficult. Despite these challenges, his work with COI revealed a renewed determination to make positive changes, improve his quality of life, and become self-sufficient.

With the support of COI staff, James was able to secure a safe and affordable apartment in a rural area of the county. Through the Western NY Integrated Care Collaborative program (WNYICC), COI provided assistance for his security deposit and six months of rent, giving him the stability and time he needed to focus on rebuilding his life without the immediate burden of housing costs.

Today, James remains successfully housed in his apartment and has made significant progress toward financial independence. In September, he reached out to COI to share his appreciation:

> ***"I just wanted to say thank you again for the help with rent during this rebuilding time for me. It has been extremely helpful and has put me in a position where I can comfortably pay my own bills moving forward."***

His story is a powerful example of how providing the right assistance at the right time can create lasting change. COI's support did more than help him secure housing—it provided him with an opportunity to regain stability, rebuild his confidence, and move toward a future where he can comfortably meet his own needs.

This customer's journey demonstrates the impact of supportive services. When people are given the opportunity and resources to overcome barriers, they can move from homelessness to stability and toward self-sufficiency.



Safe House Halloween Event

On October 28th, the Great Pumpkin visited the Safe House in Jamestown, bringing candy and crafts to all the ghost, goblins, vampires and spidermen that visited. Over 120 members of the community attended the Safe House Halloween event, many of who joined the Great Pumpkin for a photo. Several youth from COI's Youth Corps volunteered their time to work stations in the Safe House and share information about COI services to the guests.

The Safe House is COI"s runaway and homeless youth shelter for children under age 18. Youth Corps is available to any youth ages 14 to 21 who are interested in participating in monthly community projects. Call (716) 661-9446 for more information.



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc

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Chief Executive Officer

Judy Yonkers,
Director of Grants and Systems Compliance
Dan Mets,
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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 Enrollment
Provider Mentoring and 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



Youth Residential Staff are pictured with Chris Nicosia, Director of Health and Family Services and Ashley Kubis, Residential Services Manager. Luke Macakanja, Elena Rivera-Abbey, Kirsten Morales and Trisha Hudson



www.chautauquaopportunities.com @chautauquaopportunities @chautopp @chautopp

Upcoming Events

NOVEMBER 11, 2026
Veterans' Day
OFFICES CLOSED

NOVEMBER 12, 2026
Community Conversations
5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

NOVEMBER 18, 2026
Section 8 Wait list Sign up - Jamestown, NY
8:30AM - 4:30PM

NOVEMBER 26, 2025
Thanksgiving Holiday
OFFICES CLOSED

NOVEMBER 27, 2025
Thanksgiving Holiday
OFFICES CLOSED

NOVEMBER 30
Section 8 Wait list Sign up - Dunkirk, NY
8:30AM - 4:30PM

Contact Us

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