

ISSUE #2



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CAREGIVER CONNECTIONS

A YCS NEWSLETTER THAT BUILDS CONNECTIONS TO SUPPORT OUR LOVED ONES



CAREGIVER CONNECTIONS

LETTER FROM THE PARENT SATISFACTION COMMITTEE CHAIR WILLIAM WALLER

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Welcome to the second edition of Caregiver Connections. There is so much encouraging news we'd like to share with you.

In this issue, two parents serving on the Parent Satisfaction Committee share their personal experiences and the lessons they have learned while supporting their adult children in YCS residences. We hope their stories offer encouragement, spark new ideas, and inspire conversations about caregiving and partnering with your loved one's care team.

Recently, the house managers at two of our residences received heartfelt letters of appreciation—one from a young woman whose brother recently transitioned into our Princeton home, and another from a mother who stood by her daughter's side through multiple hospitalizations with the support of compassionate YCS staff. We are honored to share these touching letters because they remind us that, by supporting and encouraging one another, we all become stronger.

We are also pleased to share the results of an independent, comprehensive accreditation survey of our residential programs across New Jersey. The survey reaffirmed YCS's commitment to providing high-quality, person-centered care. You can read more about the results on page 5.

Of course, nothing captures the spirit of our programs better than the smiles of the individuals we serve as they enjoy community activities, special events, and everyday moments together. We hope the photos throughout this issue bring a smile to your face as well.

Most importantly, we want to hear from you. Your feedback helps us make Caregiver Connections a valuable resource for families. If there are topics you would like us to cover or ideas you would like to share, please don't hesitate to contact me. We welcome your suggestions and look forward to hearing from you.

On behalf of the Parent Satisfaction Committee, we wish you and your family a safe, relaxing, and enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,
Bill Waller
Chair, Parent Satisfaction Committee

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Cover Photo: Dianna and Steve Chipkin
and their son Daniel.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- BLOSSOMS ART EXHIBIT & AWARDS SHOW
- A DREAM REALIZED
- CARF
- CHARTING THE LIFECOURSE
- FAMILY PROFILE
- NURSES
- LETTERS OF APPRECIATION
- YCS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
- HIGHLIGHTS

*IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE PARENT
SATISFACTION COMMITTEE, PLEASE CONTACT
WILLIAM WALLER AT WWALLER@YCS.ORG*



BLOSSOMS ART EXHIBIT AND AWARDS SHOW



The energy and enthusiasm of children and teens at many of our residences across the state filled the bergenPAC with pure joy at the 19th Annual Blossoms Art Exhibition and Awards Show on May 4. For months prior to the event, youth worked on dance routines, solo song performances, and a riveting spoken word presentation with the guidance and encouragement of their music and dance therapists-while art therapists and clinicians supported each budding young artist as they worked on their unique interpretations of the theme Art Lifts and Frees Me. The impact of the event has continued long after the awards were presented. Jessica Lew, clinician at Sawtelle Hall explained.



"The children were initially hesitant to participate in Blossoms thinking it was pointless because they were not good enough. With lots of encouragement, they worked together to construct a freestanding figure filled with positive affirmations. Winning the award for Best Group Project and being cheered on as they accepted the award on the stage was a tremendous confidence booster.

Afterwards, Nia, 13, remarked 'I didn't think we'd win. It felt good when someone thought we did a good job.' Since then, there has been a noticeable reduction in negative self-talk, and an increase in positive self-reflection. Youth have become more willing to draw, color, and take creative risks. Art therapy has evolved into a consistently welcomed part of their week - not a single youth declines the opportunity to participate."

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

A DREAM REALIZED: AMERRA BEGINS A CAREER IN CAREGIVING



Charlotte Prunty and Amerra Bouie



A surprise celebration for Amerra

For the past two years, Amerra Bouie, 24, has been a participant at the YCS Sawtelle Buffalo home. When she first arrived, the shy, quiet young woman had no clear direction for her future. However, deep in her heart was a desire to be able to help other people.

With the daily guidance and encouragement of her Direct Support Professional (DSP), Ms. Rojean, and the Buffalo home staff, Amerra steadily developed the self-care and independent living skills needed to pursue her dream.

At the suggestion of a friend, she enrolled in a Home Health Aide certification program and successfully completed it this June.

"I am so proud that I found a job where I can help other people," Amerra said with a smile.

In her new role, she will visit senior citizens in their homes, remind them to take their medications, prepare meals, and assist with light housekeeping. At first, Amerra was concerned that the job would be too challenging, especially since some of her clients would have limited mobility. Today, she is confident in her abilities and eager to begin helping her first clients.

To celebrate this important milestone, the staff and residents surprised Amerra with a celebration in her honor.

"Amerra's confidence in herself has grown exponentially, and she is now able to make the right decisions for herself," said Charlotte Prunty, House Manager.

YCS Sawtelle residential programs provide intensive behavioral interventions in a home-like environment for individuals with acute developmental and intellectual disabilities and co-occurring behavioral challenges. The Buffalo Home provides loving care for 6 women 21 years of age and over.

YCS RESIDENCES EARN HIGH MARKS DURING CARF REVIEW

by Matthew Hopkins, Data Analytics and Privacy Officer



YCS welcomed eight surveyors from CARF International (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) on May 27–29 to conduct a comprehensive review of all YCS residential programs. This survey, conducted every three years, provides valuable feedback and guidance to help YCS maintain the highest standards of care and service throughout its residential programs.

They inspected our sites, pored over our documentation with a fine-toothed comb, and interviewed our participants, staff, and parents. They checked our performance against over 1500 standards. We received only 11 CARF “recommendations,” a significant improvement from 26 in 2022. This reflects meaningful progress across our programs. The surveyors also shared very positive feedback about YCS. They were particularly impressed by:

- The Blossoms Event
- The longevity and commitment of our staff
- Our internship program, including the number of staff who began as YCS interns
- The welcoming, personalized environments in our homes
- The strength of our Treatment Home Program
- The successful integration of staff who joined YCS in November as part of the transition of seven new programs

CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) is a private, nonprofit organization focused on quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services with the aim of enhancing the lives of the persons served. YCS values and supports CARF’s belief that all people have the right to be treated equitably with dignity, respect, and inclusion; should have access to services that help them achieve optimal outcomes; and should be empowered to make informed choices.

A PARENT'S INSIGHT

CREATING A GREAT LIFE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE.

by Cathy Tamburello, parent

It's always been a bit of a puzzle to get to know my son, Michael. Since he doesn't speak, he doesn't always share what he needs or what's on his mind. He's also quite good at getting people who care about him to help him with things he could handle himself. He has some tricky medical issues that need careful attention, especially when you know his background and what's most important to him. He lives in a group home, and over the years, I've been trying to find the right balance between Michael as an individual with his own goals and his role as part of a group living situation with other people.

Now that Michael is 40, he's grown and changed a lot. Living outside our family home has opened new experiences for him, things I might not have had the chance to try. Of course, there have been challenges along the way too. My goal has always been to work with everyone who supports Michael to help him live a life that's just right for him. That's why I became so committed to Person Centered Planning through Charting the LifeCourse.



Cathy and Michael

Every person deserves a full life, one that's uniquely theirs. Many YCS participants find it hard to explain what that means, and they might need a little help from others. As Michael's mom, I often say I'm a Michael expert, but how do I share all the things I've learned from raising him with the dedicated YCS staff, his dedicated day program staff, and his amazing support coordinator? I'm happy to say that YCS has embraced a Person-Centered Approach through Charting the LifeCourse. So, what does that mean, and how can families get involved in the process?

You might have received a Charting the LifeCourse form from the YCS staff, which asks about your loved one's goals in various life areas. This isn't just another form we families need to complete. Instead, it's a chance to have a collaborative conversation with your loved one, your family, the YCS team, the Support Coordinator, and anyone else who supports them. The goal is to identify what matters most to your loved one. It is a chance to look at what is important to your loved one and what is important for them. Here's an example I use for Michael:

- It's important to Michael to get out of the house regularly for walks and Pizza!
- It's important for Michael to be closely monitored during those walks to ensure he doesn't fall.
- It is important to Michael to have a predictable schedule.
- It is important for Michael to have that communicated visually to compensate for his hearing loss.

By working together and keeping track of our conversations, we can come up with fresh ideas, support, and services that help our loved ones thrive and find joy. So, when you get the Charting the LifeCourse form, make sure everyone involved in your loved one's life takes part in filling it out. You can do this during your annual program review meeting or any IDT meeting. This document is a living thing, and we should all review and update it at every meeting. We all grow and change as we go, and we're always looking for new experiences, skills, and activities. The same goes for our loved ones with intellectual and developmental disabilities!

Check out the Charting the LifeCourse website at www.lifecoursetools.com

FAMILY PROFILE

MEET THE CHIPKINS

For more than a decade, Dianna and Steve Chipkin have been part of the YCS family. Their journey began when their son, Daniel, was referred to the YCS Sawtelle In-Home Behavioral Support Program as an adolescent.

It was there that they met Anthony Baskin, a behavioral assistant who worked closely with Daniel to help him develop daily living skills. Anthony has remained an important part of Daniel's journey, continuing to support him as Daniel transitioned at age 18 to the Sawtelle Lawn Ridge home and, most recently, to the Sawtelle Thomas Residence, a permanent home for young adults. Today, Anthony serves as Daniel's Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).



Dianna and Daniel at a restaurant on Father's Day

Dianna believes that maintaining frequent communication with staff—especially the house manager—is essential to ensuring Daniel receives the best possible care. "We work together as a team," she said. "The house manager lets us know when Daniel needs new seasonal clothing, toiletries, or a replacement tablet, which is especially important because he relies on it so much. We are informed about all of his medical appointments, and we stay in close contact with his day program to address any behavioral concerns. They also keep us updated on the fun activities he enjoys both at the residence and in the community."

That collaborative approach has made a meaningful difference in Daniel's quality of life.

Since moving to the Thomas Residence, Daniel has become more expressive with his words. Recently, to his parents' delight, he shared that he has a best friend at the home - a milestone they never expected to hear.

Daniel has also made remarkable progress in managing behaviors that once presented significant challenges. For years, he struggled with aggressive and often uncontrollable food-seeking behaviors. After being referred to a metabolic endocrinologist and receiving ongoing medical care, those behaviors have been successfully addressed. "Daniel has also learned how to self-redirect when he feels certain behaviors are becoming difficult to control," Dianna said.

As parents, Dianna and Steve remain actively involved in their son's life. They bring him home two or three times each week to enjoy home-cooked meals and frequently take him out to dinner. "We went to an Italian restaurant near the Thomas Residence for Father's Day and had a wonderful time," Dianna shared.

For the Chipkins, staying connected with Daniel and partnering closely with YCS staff has helped him thrive. Their experience is a reminder that when families and caregivers work together, individuals can achieve meaningful growth, greater independence, and a richer quality of life.

SPOTLIGHT ON AGENCY SERVICES

HOW OUR NURSES SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS IN YCS RESIDENCES

by Deanna DeStefano ADN, RN, Vice President of Nursing



Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs) are an important part of your child's treatment team in our residential treatment programs. While therapists focus on emotional and behavioral treatment, nurses ensure each individual's physical health, medication management, and overall wellness are supported throughout their stay. By addressing both physical and behavioral health needs, our nursing team helps individuals remain healthy, engaged in treatment, and prepared for success both in the program and beyond.

Our nurses provide safe medication administration, monitor for medication effectiveness and potential side effects, assess acute and ongoing medical concerns, respond to illnesses and injuries, and coordinate care with primary care providers, psychiatrists, specialists, hospitals, pharmacies, and other healthcare professionals. They also oversee routine healthcare needs such as annual physicals, immunizations, dental and vision appointments, laboratory testing, and follow-up care to ensure each individual receives comprehensive medical services.

Because many individuals in residential treatment receive psychiatric medications, nurses play a critical role in monitoring both physical and mental health. They assess for changes in mood, behavior, sleep, appetite, energy level, and overall functioning, while monitoring for medication side effects or adverse reactions. Nurses communicate these observations with prescribing providers and the interdisciplinary treatment team so that care can be adjusted when needed.

Nurses also help individuals develop lifelong health and wellness skills. Through daily interactions, they provide education on personal hygiene, nutrition, healthy lifestyle choices, medication understanding, chronic health conditions, reproductive health, illness prevention, and recognizing when medical attention is needed. These teaching opportunities encourage greater independence and help individuals build the confidence to manage their own health.

Working collaboratively is an essential part of nursing care in residential treatment. Nurses partner with therapists, psychiatrists, behavioral specialists, educators, direct-care staff, case managers, and families to ensure care is coordinated and consistent. They provide training and clinical guidance to staff on medication administration, recognizing changes in health status, infection prevention, emergency response, and supporting individuals with complex medical and behavioral health needs.

As individuals prepare to transition home or to a less restrictive setting, nurses help ensure continuity of care by coordinating follow-up appointments, communicating with community healthcare providers, reviewing medication plans, and educating families about ongoing healthcare needs. This collaboration helps support a safe, successful transition and promotes long-term health and stability.

At the heart of nursing is advocacy, compassion, and whole-person care. Our LPNs and RNs are committed to promoting the health, safety, and well-being of every individual while supporting treatment goals, fostering independence, and helping each person achieve their highest level of physical and emotional wellness.

LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

FAMILY EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE

Dear Korey,

In just a few days, my brother Byron will be moving into the YCS Princeton house. As you can imagine, we are both excited to partner with YCS as Byron's provider, though we naturally feel a bit of apprehension about such a big transition.

Yesterday, I brought Byron for one final visit to the home before Monday's move, and I wanted to share how much comfort your team has given us. Any worries I have are lessened every time I interact with the YCS staff. From Tuesday's Zoom meeting—where eight team members showed up to ask thoughtful questions about Byron's needs—to our visit yesterday with Deanna and Mike, their professionalism, empathy, and care are always on full display. It is entirely because of your staff that I feel confident this is the right move for Byron.

I thought you'd like to know just how wonderful your team is at helping a new family feel genuinely supported and valued during an emotional time.

Kind regards,
Wendy Hill

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude to Tonya Patillo and Marsha Armstrong, who have both gone above and beyond for my daughter and our family. Unfortunately, Amanda has been in and out of foster homes, hospitals, and treatment homes most of her life, so we are not new to this system of care. This time was different, as reunification is not possible, making it especially tough emotionally for both Amanda and our family. These two women have provided Amanda with the emotional and social supports she has needed throughout her stay, even in her darkest times. I have been hugged and held in hospital waiting rooms when I was at a loss as to how to help my child. There has not been a time when I did not feel supported or understood regarding the difficulties of our situation. When Mr. Rodgers said, "look for the helpers", Tonya and Marsha are the helpers. You should be extremely proud to have staff on your team that supports families during their most trying times. We are forever grateful!

Best regards,
Emily St-Dic and Family



Exciting Live Auction goes live two weeks prior to the event. More information to follow.

YCS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SAFEGUARD YOUR LOVED ONE'S RIGHTS

by Cathy Tamburello, parent

Have you received an email inviting you to a meeting with the Human Rights Committee? This meeting is an important opportunity to review your loved one's Behavior Support Plan.

Each month, the YCS Human Rights Committee (HRC) meets to assess behavior support plans for individuals in YCS' youth and adult I/DD and DD homes. Typically, every participant's plan is reviewed annually, but the committee may conduct more frequent reviews if any changes are necessary.

HRC's Mission:

The committee is dedicated to providing an impartial perspective, ensuring that participants involved with YCS have their civil and human rights safeguarded. This is particularly crucial if your loved one's Behavior Support Plan includes elements such as personal controls, restrictions on specific items, or technological safeguards like doorbell alarms.

What can you expect at the time of your Human Rights Review?

These meetings are conducted virtually. Members of the YCS Behavior Support Committee will present the target behaviors and their frequency. This will be followed by strategies to prevent or reduce target behaviors. Finally, procedures for addressing the behavior are reviewed.

Most importantly, committee members and the family will have the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. The committee will then vote to approve the plan, request changes, or additional information.

Why is your participation in the HRC Committee review for your loved one important?

The Division of Developmental Disabilities values the involvement of everyone, including your family, when a behavior plan might restrict their rights. Family input is invaluable because they offer firsthand experience that professionals might not possess. Individuals with behavioral challenges often struggle to articulate themselves, so they may resort to behavior as a means of communication. Family input can assist the team in understanding why your loved one is acting as they are and how to guide them toward a positive path.

When it's time to review your loved one's plan, Jaime Fox, YCS Chief Quality and Compliance Officer, will invite you to attend the meeting.

*FAMILY MEMBERS ARE VALUED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. YCS NOT ONLY WANTS FAMILY INVOLVEMENT BUT WELCOMES IT! FAMILY VOICE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT VOICE. THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE IS LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL MEMBERS. PLEASE CONSIDER BECOMING A HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEMBER.
CONTACT JAIME FOX AT [JFOX@YCS.ORG](mailto:jfox@ycs.org).*

PHOTO GALLERY

HIGHLIGHTS



BBQ on the Vine at the Vineland Home



BBQ on the Vine at the Vineland Home



Northern Region Spring Dinner Dance



Northern Region Spring Dinner Dance



HIGHLIGHTS



Movie Night



Spring Concert at Essex
Community College



Nicolas is escorted to his prom



Juneteenth Celebration at a DD home



CREW's Northern Region Basketball Game



CREW's Northern Region Basketball Game

