



Supporting People with Disabilities Since 1972

April 27, 2021

What does it take to make a home? A roof over our heads, a well-stocked pantry, people who care...

We found all of this and more when we recently had outdoor visits with residents and staff at one home where CO-OP assists four women. What does it take to create a safe, welcoming, "home bubble" for four lovely ladies? Well, quite a lot actually...

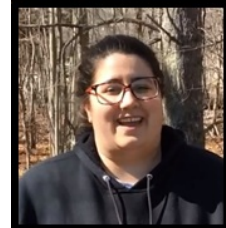
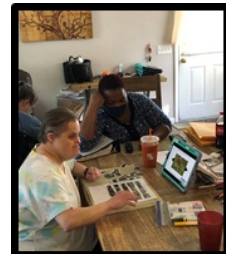
Wear Your Masks, Wash Your Hands, Social Distance

We've all made changes and adjustments over the past year. Some were changes that we could never have imagined. Many were essential for safety--wear your masks, social distance, wash your hands. We know this by heart and all do this to remain safe. Now, imagine doing this across three shifts (at least!) of essential direct care workers who made it their mission to not only give people the support needed to keep them safe but to make pandemic life productive and fun.

With day services suspended or drastically reduced, many individuals were home with daily routines interrupted, work on personal goals in flux, and usual and joyful activities having come to an abrupt halt. Under the leadership of CO-OP's Chief Operating Officer Gail Gordon, Residential Directors Erin Morley and Katelyn Eagan, along with Day Program Director Lucy De Oliveira, teams rallied, and CO-OP's staff shifted work assignments when necessary to staff 33 homes 24 hours each day, 7 days a week. Everyone put on their face masks, stepped up, and worked where they were needed most.

The direct care workers, the teachers, the clinical staff, the coordinators, and everyone else at CO-OP made all of these change work.

When we put one home with one team of staff members under the spotlight, this is what we found.



Consistent, Flexible, Creative

As teams were reassigned, Lucy De Oliveira tells us, "We worked to place staff in homes where staff knew individuals from their usual day programs. This assured a high comfort level with the staff. Plus, the day and residential staff worked together to continue with structured activities at home." Eki Igharo is one example as she came to this home after having worked with Kendra Leanes at CO-OP's Ingell Street Day program. Staff member Faith Burtauh explains it this way, "People come and go in their lives..." so consistency is an ever-present goal at CO-OP.

Everyone learned just how flexible and creative we could be. For some, it was a

return to positions they had experienced in the past. For others, it was a new learning experience as they found their work in day programs now done in new and different ways. Work on personal goals continues and is enabled by CO-OP's residential staff. One year ago, few of us had heard of zoom—now it is a routine activity for many as they connect with day program teachers. Learning skills work comes from individual packages assembled at CO-OP and delivered to the front door. Crafts projects are done at the kitchen table instead of in a CO-OP art room.



More from the Team



Residential Coordinator Kimberly Wagner-Espanola believes success for everyone in a residential home comes down to "...making a connection with people and understanding who you are working with." We all have a way of being that makes us happy and Kim has spent the last year building a team that works well together while they successfully meet the individuals' needs during an extremely challenging time. Kim's competence and decades-long experience in the disabilities field proved valuable as all our worlds turned upside down.



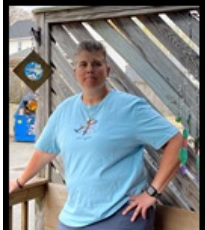
Kim's residential team is a mix of staff; some have years of experience in residential programs, with others like Eki and Brittany Moul, joining the team on temporary assignments until they return to their day program jobs. Brittany, who had experience with similar agencies in Rhode Island, was hired just a few months ago for CO-OP's Dighton Day program but now on a temporary assignment with Kim's residential team.



When we met with the team, Supervisor Kelly Jones, who was hired last August, made us smile when she said, "I feel like this is what I was meant to do." A perfect fit.



We also had interesting conversations with those that choose the evening or overnight shifts. Some people love an alternative schedule that is conducive to the rest of their lives. Abigail Ogunbanjo may be a newcomer to CO-OP but she's been in the field for 10 years. With young children, she feels it is important for her to be home during the day and even more so now when at least partial on-line learning is the norm for most school-age children. September Thomas, too, comes to us with prior valuable experience as a residential counselor with a similar agency. She now juggles her time between her shifts at CO-OP and as caregiver to her aunt.



Ashley Hiller staffs the 2nd shift and started with us in January of this year. This works perfectly for her as she recently earned her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and is now working on her Master's degree. She tells us about the satisfaction she feels when she "...helps people reach their potential." Lucky for us, Ashley plans on a long career with CO-OP!

Rounding out the 2nd and overnight shifts is Kayla Kopple, who staffs both and fills in whenever and wherever needed. She brings years of experience, including working in Pennsylvania. Kayla told us how the medication certification in Massachusetts is very different with MA Department of Developmental Services overseeing training while the agencies themselves did this in Pennsylvania.

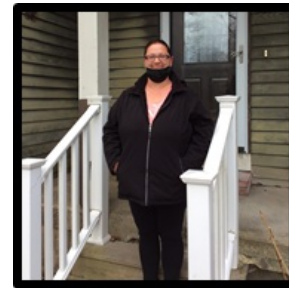
Coordinator Kim told a similar story of differences in training in her former state of Arizona, where she managed as many as 7 homes. At CO-OP, she feels fortunate to have the time to build strong teams for the two homes she now manages. Although there are differences between the two states, Kim feels fortunate she can draw from this experience to help inform her work at CO-OP.

One staff member, Melissa Arruda, came to CO-OP without experience in direct care but learned quickly with assignments at various CO-OP homes. During COVID, of course, she is assigned to just one home in line with CO-OP's COVID protocols. Melissa said she is grateful for the opportunity to get to know the residents in a deeper, more meaningful way. While Melissa may be just learning the ropes as compared to the very experienced staff around her, she most certainly adds value to the team, especially as she focused her overnight energies on a "deep cleaning routine" so important during this extraordinary time. There is no letting up on health and safety protocols and the night shifts play an even more important role. On an individual level, this shift work may also help Melissa as she debates a long-term personal goal of furthering her education.



"The Sixth Man"

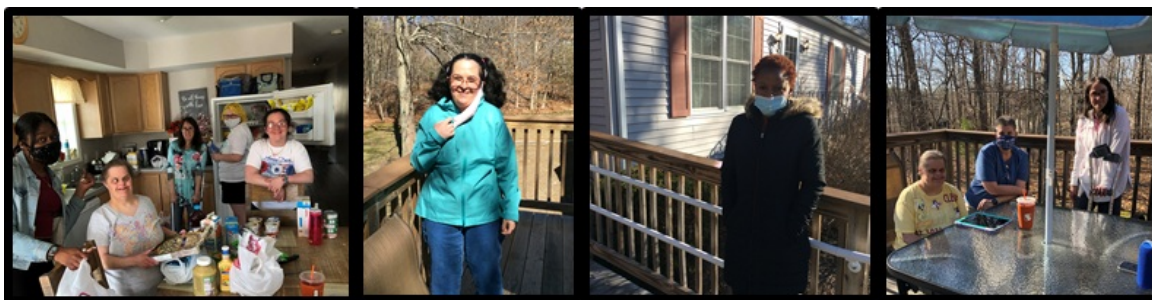
Finally, we are pretty sure every team needs a "Sixth Man." In this case, we have Jacqueline Ricci. Jacqui started with CO-OP at this very home on the overnight shift while her children were young. In 2015, she joined CO-OP's Norton day program and since March of 2020, Jacqui's experience in day and residential programs, along with time as a clinical assistant, has been vitally important to this one home. While she is happy to help whenever and wherever she is needed, she looks forward to returning to her niche at Norton Day where she takes great pleasure when she witnesses individual progress or, as she tells us, "watching people blossom right in front of you."



... And What Matters Most

Along with the sheer logistic challenges of a 24/7 home, continued work with individuals around personal goals and socialization is top of mind for everyone. Staying connected with family and friends for a time was a phone call or video call on zoom. Outdoor visits during a long cold winter wasn't possible but now that spring has arrived, families and friends are back for outside visits with appropriate safety measures in place.

As we look to better days ahead, we will continue to stay safe. Wear a mask, social distance, wash your hands...and enjoy spring!



Let's Work Together

Feel free to contact the CO-OP Senior Management team at **508-824-1717** for assistance.

Joyce Faria
Gail Gordon
Lucy Andrade
Lucy de Oliveira

President & Chief Executive Officer
Vice President, Chief Operating Officer
Vice President, Human Resources
Director, Day Programs

jfaria@co-op.cc
ggordon@co-op.cc
lfandrade@co-op.cc
ldoliveira@co-op.cc

Jeanne Connolly
Katelyn Eagan
Erin Morley

Director, Marketing & Development
Director, Specialized Services
Director, Residential Programs

jconnolly@co-op.cc
keagan@co-op.cc
emorley@co-op.cc

If you'd like to read more about our senior managers, visit our website at www.co-op.cc.

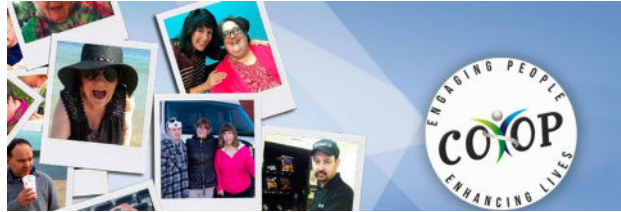
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at www.co-op.cc



CO-OP | 455 Somerset Ave., No. Dighton, MA 02764 | 508-824-1717 | www.co-op.cc

