



**Please note, this is the only newsletter for the month of February.
The next newsletter will arrive on March 15th.

DD Community Forum Notes and Recording

Notes from the Community Forum held on February 9 are attached to this newsletter. The recording of the forum can be found [here](#).

National Caregivers Day



February 18, 2022 was National Caregivers day! Thank you to all caregivers, past and present, for their dedication, support and hard work.

“There are only four kinds of people in the world. Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.” — **Rosalyn Carter**

Employment Stories in RI

Watch videos from the [RI Association for People Supporting Employment First](#) (RIAPSE) highlighting employers who have hired people with disabilities.

- [What’s Working: An Untapped Workforce](#)
- [We Share Hope in RI](#)

WJAR-10 promotes RI APSE! Check out this Show Us Something Good-Chime In news story:

- [Johnston man knows the value of a dollar; Works three jobs and loves it](#)



Collaborating with various Rhode Island state agencies and their service providers to identify new sources of underrepresented talent, the **WorkABILITY initiative of Skills for RI’s Future** is designed to help meet the employer partner’s hiring needs while also considering

their goals for diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

- Access free consultative services
- Meet goals for diversity, equity and within your workforce
- Gain access to qualified candidates to fill existing roles within an organization
- Collaborate on supported or customized employment solutions

See <https://skillsforri.com/workability> for more information, including an example of a [video resume](#).

Consent Decree Status Hearing

The Status Hearing before Judge McConnell, held virtually on February 3, 2022, covered testimony on four topics:

1. Rate and Payment Methodology Review

The Deputy Purchasing Agent for the State shared testimony on the contract award chronology, detailing the many process steps between the bid solicitation posting date of September 14, 2021 and the Purchase Order award date of January 24, 2022. The awarded vendor, Health Management Associates (HMA), was represented at the hearing by project lead Stephen Pawlowski, who introduced himself and briefly spoke at a high-level about the project. The Court expects the recommendations to be completed by December 1, 2022.

2. Transformation Grants

DD Director Kevin Savage discussed the release of funds for transformation grants for provider agencies. The total available funds of \$4 million was awarded to 29 providers. A second round of transformation fund applications will be available in February and will be open to both agencies licensed by BHDDH and other agencies.

3. Status of Administrative Barriers Workgroups

Kevin Savage presented updates for each of the 16 Fiscal Issues/Administrative Barriers identified in the July 2020 Court Order, as well as the developed strategies and associated timelines to resolve each of the issues. He outlined which processes will be completed by March 31, 2022, and which will be incorporated into the Rate and Payment Methodology project or in the Conflict-Free Case Management implementation project. This timeline document will be filed by the Court Monitor.

4. State Agency Updates

Representatives from the RI Department of Education (RIDE), Office of Rehabilitative Services (ORS), Department of Labor and Training (DLT), and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) each provided testimony regarding the overall status of the Consent Decree and Action Plan. Each agency has been intensely engaged in a comprehensive array of initiatives and efforts to support urgent implementation of the October 2021 Action Plan, and to support implementation of the State's Employment First policy.

One significant update, provided by DLT, covered the extensive amount of time and effort that internal State employees and external stakeholder partners are investing into organizing, developing, and implementing the Statewide Direct Support Professional (DSP) Workforce Initiative, which encompasses a Core Organizing Group and four subgroups: Recruitment and Retention; Standards and Credentialing; Inservice Training & Professional Development; and Institutes of Higher Education.

At the conclusion of the Status hearing, Judge McConnell expressed that he is "in awe of the commitment of this team, headed by Kevin Savage, to move mountains".

Confused About COVID Mask Mandates?

The mask-or-proof-of-vaccination requirement for Rhode Island businesses and other indoor venues was lifted effective Friday, February 11. Gov. Dan McKee made the announcement after declaring "we're seeing a lot of encouraging movement" in pandemic data. While transmission rates are still high, the numbers are improving. As of 2/8, Rhode Island reported an average of 697 new COVID cases a day over the previous week, down 40% from the week before and down 71% from two weeks before.

At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) still recommends masking in areas with high COVID-19 transmission, which is pretty much most of the country right now, including Rhode Island. And by federal order, masks are still required on public transportation, such as RIPTA buses and even school buses.

Many people across the country are confused by the different messages being put out and are trying to figure out how best to navigate this phase of the pandemic. Within the DD community, we're all trying to stay safe while ensuring people have the supports they need. We all look forward to being able to remove COVID-related restrictions. But we know many people in our community are at higher risk from COVID than the general population, so mask wearing is still encouraged.

Dr. Megan Ranney, an emergency physician and academic dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, told the Providence Journal, "masks are still one part of a multi-pronged strategy to minimize COVID's harm. Two important takeaways: First, we need clear guidelines for when to lift guidelines and when to put them back in place in case of future surges. Second, we need to continue to ensure that vulnerable adults and kids continue to be protected, through ventilation and higher standards in certain areas such as hospitals."

One thing all public officials agree on, if you're symptomatic — runny nose, cough, body aches, feeling tired — you really should test before going somewhere. Better still, stay home. As RI Health Department Interim Director Dr. James McDonald said, "Please don't bring your symptoms into someone else's party."

McDonald also urged civility regarding people's decision to wear or not wear a mask, saying "quite frankly, I think a little more calmness and sanity and kindness would go a long way for everybody."

Mental Health & Aging: Supporting a Loved One **Wednesday, March 2, 2022 from 1:00 PM to 2:00 PM** **[Register Here](#)**

This webinar will discuss the importance of mental health among older adults and provide tools and resources for families and caregivers to support their loved ones. Speakers Lakelyn Hogan, PhD, and April Ibarra, MGS from Home Instead will discuss social isolation, COVID-19, and common mental and emotional health issues that can develop with age.

Celebrating Black History Month

Autistics of Color: We Exist...We Matter.

Below read a piece by [Morénike Giwa Onaiwu](#) titled “Autistics of Color: We Exist...We Matter” excerpted from the anthology [All The Weight Of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism](#) by Lydia X. Z. Brown and the Autism Women & Nonbinary Network.

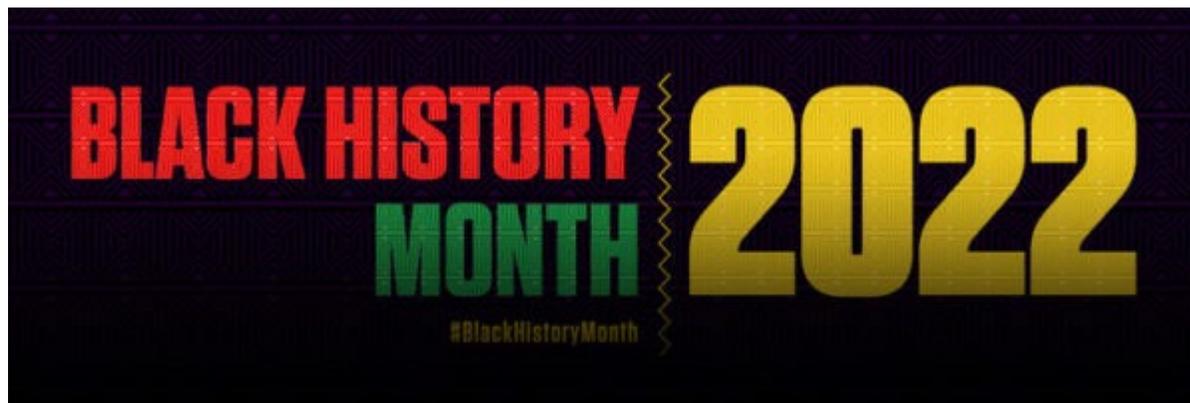


“Ableism and racism have become deeply ingrained into the collective mindset of humankind. There are so many complex, unspoken, and often contradictory rules about behavior, identity, culture, and society for us to try to comprehend, exacerbated by the reality that since few of the messages we receive about our neurology or our ethnicity is positive, some, perhaps many, of us internalize those unflattering messages.

We – the autistics of color – are seldom acknowledged. Our faces, bodies, and voices are conspicuously absent from not only literature and media, but also from much of the discourse surrounding race and that of autism as well. And when we do appear, we are rarely depicted favorably. We are painted as defective, flawed, undesirable, different. To be pitied. Not only are we non-white, but we are also disabled too? Uh oh. (Or wahala – o!)

When people finally deign to discuss us, it is often to underscore troubling data about autism, most notably the tremendous cost/burden to society autistics are. Typically invisible, we seem to be only dragged into the spotlight as examples when others need to use us to make a point, and even then we are merely reduced to tales of woe and dismal anecdotes. Afterward, we – our plight, our issues, our needs – return to the realm of the ignored, collecting dust until we are needed to serve as unwilling tokens for someone else’s cause yet again.

This might sound calloused, but it is the simple truth. We – those of us who exist at the intersection of disability and race – aren’t treated as if we are “real.” Little concern is paid to the innumerable factors present in our lives that impact how we view ourselves and the world, to how we ourselves are viewed by the world, to our strengths, to our needs. This is a grave injustice. Our lives and experiences cannot be splintered or subdivided into neat little categories; race over here, disability over there. We whose lives are greatly impacted by both racial and disability matters deserve to be more than tokens one day and non-existent the next.”



Black History Month in Rhode Island Events and Information

[Visit Rhode Island](#) offers some ways to explore and commemorate Black History Month this year in the Ocean State, as well as some local [Black-owned shops, restaurants, and more](#) to check out!

Discover Newport has a listing of local events for Black History Month at <https://www.discovernewport.org/blog/post/black-history-month-events/>

Providence Community Library has a [listing of books, movies, videos](#), and a [lecture series](#).

“Through the Wisdom and Knowledge of Dr. Gross:” Stories from Black Life in Rhode Island

[View the tour HERE](#)



Watch an interactive history tour curated by Jillian Estrada and Alexander Tum, students at Rhode Island College, and Amy Barlow, Associate Professor and Librarian at Rhode Island College, in partnership and consultation with Dr. Shawn Anthony Christian, Professor of English and African American Studies at Wheaton College, MA.

A friend of the Providence-based physician Dr. Carl Russell Gross once wrote, “To talk with Dr. Gross on any subject is a thrilling experience. But to talk with him concerning Rhode Island History is to actually be there where the event is occurring. Every Rhode Islander should have the opportunity to see Rhode Island History as it relates to the Black man through the wisdom and knowledge of Dr. Gross.”

This tour is an opportunity to “be there” experiencing history through the wisdom of Dr. Carl Russell Gross (1888-1971). Throughout his life, Dr. Gross collected materials in service of a book that he was writing on Black history in Rhode Island. He drafted numerous timelines, each containing short notes on people and organizations, which were donated by his niece to Rhode Island College after his death.

The stories on this tour take their inspiration from Dr. Gross’s notes—readers will find an excerpt from his manuscript after each story. Each vignette stands alone, but taken together we get a picture of an interconnected Black community with its members living, learning, and working throughout Rhode Island during the first half of the 20th century.

To view all RIC events for Black History Month, visit www.ric.edu.bhm2022.

Supporting Black Caregivers and Older Adults

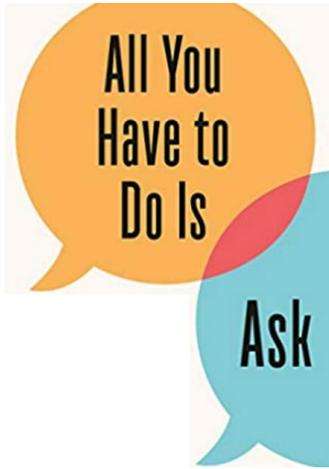
[Watch An Interview with Dr. Donna Benton](#)

To celebrate Black History Month and National Caregivers Day (February 18th), the National Center on Law and Elder Rights (NCLER) interviewed Dr. Donna Benton of the University of Southern California’s Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. In this brief video interview, Dr. Benton discusses her work supporting Black caregivers, the importance of caregiving in the Black community, and strategies for advocates. She also talks about the need for legal assistance in advance planning and addressing issues involving housing scams in the Black community.

Ask About the Ask

Adapted from an article by David Toback, M.A., Lead Person-Centered Services Trainer, [IntellectAbility](#)

Person-Centered Thinking practices strongly recommend that conversations get beneath the surface to provide the information truly needed. One technique to get beneath the surface is "Ask About the Ask."



The following story highlights this:

Matthew asked at each annual planning meeting for a driver's license. Unfortunately, Matthew's inability to see well would make driving a car unsafe. Each time the team met to discuss Matthew's annual plan, they politely and directly told Matthew that a driver's license was not in the cards. This was until someone asked Matthew the following question, "Matthew, what is it about the driver's license that has your attention?" Matthew replied excitedly, "Man when people buy wine or beer, they flash a card. I want that card!" It was never about driving for Matthew. By utilizing this technique, this came to light, and the fact that he wanted a library card, which you need an ID to acquire.

It's worth noting that no one is a bad person in the above story. Connecting driving a car to a driver's license is natural. "Ask About the Ask" shines a light on someone's motivation or interest. Then the Person-Centered Skills are there to enhance, capture, organize, and share the fruit of those conversations.

**Person-Centered Thinking
goes beyond a mind-set.
It's a skill set.**

U.S. Department of Labor Report on Mental Health Parity

In late January, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) [reported](#) to Congress on health insurer compliance with Federal Mental Health Parity law. The results were not good.

Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh explained in a [press release](#). You can read what the Kennedy Forum has to say about it [here](#). For coverage about the top reasons why health plans fail mental health parity compliance, [click here](#).

MHARI's www.RIParity.org website includes resources to help patients and their family members recognize common parity violations on the [Know Your Rights page here](#).

"The report's findings clearly indicate that health plans and insurance companies are falling short of providing parity in mental health and substance-use disorder benefits, at a time when those benefits are needed like never before."

Marty Walsh,
US Secretary of Labor

Federal Guidance for Health Care Providers on Civil Rights of People with Disabilities

The Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) has issued new guidance to health care providers on civil rights protections for people with disabilities. The guidance, issued by HHS' Office for Civil Rights (OCR), makes clear that in light of the continuing public health emergency, when resources can be scarce, it is vital that individuals with disabilities are not prevented from receiving needed health care benefits and services as this violates federal civil rights laws.

In the guidance, HHS clarified that federal civil rights laws apply to health care providers, including those administering COVID-19 testing, medical supplies, and medication. These rules also apply to entities providing hospitalization, long-term care, intensive treatments, and critical care, such as oxygen therapy and mechanical ventilators. Additionally, federal civil rights laws apply to state Crisis Standard of Care plans, procedures, and related standards for triaging scarce resources that hospitals are required to follow. The FAQs remind health care providers of their obligations under the law and provide examples. [Read the guidance here.](#)

People with I/DD Excluded From Clinical Trials for New Alzheimer Drug: National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) Reponse

Last summer, the FDA approved a new drug called aducanumab, one of the first treatments meant to address the cause of Alzheimer's disease and the first in a new class of treatments. Right now, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is making decisions about coverage for this new class of treatments, and they have proposed a plan that excludes people with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. While we don't yet know the extent to which this class of drugs will benefit individuals with Down syndrome, we want to make sure they have every opportunity to receive the best possible treatments now and into the future.

To learn more, you can [view the recording](#) of a recent Webinar hosted by LuMind IDSC and NDSS for Down Syndrome Affiliates in Action.

[View NDSS' comment to CMS.](#)

For more information or to learn how to file a comment, visit:
<https://www.ndss.org/cms-comment/>.



Contacting DD Staff

See the full Division Contact List attached to this newsletter.

Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00
for questions or support
(401) 462-3421

Para español, llame
(401) 462-3014

Send general questions to the
AskDD email address.

BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov

Please do not email critical issues.

Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates
and newsletters from BHDDH, you can
[sign up here](#) or on our website. Go to

<https://bhddh.ri.gov/developmentaldisabilities/events/newsandupdates/> to sign up or to see
past quarterly newsletters and issues of DD News.



SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at www.bhlink.org or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465) If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

For Information on the Consent Decree

For information on the Consent Decree and BHDDH, see <https://bhddh.ri.gov/developmental-disabilities/consent-decree>.

COVID-19 Information

Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;
Email RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov
Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>
Includes a link to ASL videos

RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>
Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email callcenter@ripin.org

Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>
Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you

Division of Developmental Disabilities - All Staff Contacts

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RI Division of Developmental Disabilities Community Forum Notes Wednesday, February 9, 2022

Kevin Savage, Director, BHDDH Division of Development Disabilities, opened up the Community Forum and welcomed all. He provided updates on the following topics:

- **Overview of the Consent Decree and Action Plan**
 - Phase 1 – Transformation funding will allocate \$4 million to support DD licensed providers to work to stabilize the workforce and in recruiting efforts.
 - Phase 2 – \$6 million will be available to grant to other entities that can meet the requirements. Applications will be sent out soon to a wider group who can offer services to adults with DD, with the goal of expanding beyond the workforce issues to get into real programmatic innovations.
 - \$2 million is available for people who self-direct services to build supports and access to training.
 - Technology Fund- \$2 million specifically dedicated for individuals in adult DD system to acquire technology that will help them with their goals that are addressed in an individual's ISP plan. This does not offer payment assistance for internet connection. More information will be out soon.
 - The Rate Review Request for Proposal bid was won by Health Management Associations, who had acquired Burns and Associations who had done a similar process in 2011. They won the bid in accordance with all rules of the State Division of Purchasing. HMA is planning to meet with stakeholders and will present a workplan in the next few weeks.
- **Caseload Estimating Conference** is new to BHDDH and DD. It is a process working with the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) and legislature to identify what the budget needs are based on caseload estimating. The second phase will be in May, when DD will be fully participating in the process. DD has hired 2 full time positions to assist in the process.
- **Sherlock Center** – Amy Grattan
 - NCI Survey – National Core Indicators survey is to assess the outcomes of the services provided with key areas including employment, rights, and health and safety among others. 650 have been selected to participate. It is voluntary. Sherlock Center team will reach out to let you know if you have been selected. This is targeted to those who are receiving services.
 - Vaccine project has begun. They were provided with funds to support providing vaccine information.

- **Conflict-Free Case Management (CFCM)**
 - CFCM is a federal Medicaid requirement for home and community- based services to plan development to be conflict free and done by an individual or group that has no bias. Stakeholders have been working on this, have received technical assistance with New Editions and make sure it complies with Medicaid rules, and with Guidehouse for assistance on how to operationalize that plan.
- **Employment**
 - There are currently 63 participants in the Person-Centered Supported Employment Performance Program 3 (P3). P3 is coming to an end June 30th.
 - Employment outcomes for October – December: 24 individuals secured employment. We have had a hard time reporting for those who are self directed, but are now using ICE forms to gather that information.
- **RICLAS** – There are no plans to close and referrals are now being accepted.
- **Self-Directed Information**
 - We do have a self-direct stakeholder group who are meeting monthly and now going quarterly. 958 are self-directing services.
 - Staffing pool for self-directed services is one of the top concerns with stakeholder group. It is something to look at with the Transformation Funds.
- **Transition to Adult Services**
 - Sue Hayward spoke about the work with Transition workgroup comprised of RIDE, ORS, school districts, others.
 - Rethinking how we share resources for even younger ages.
- **Other**
 - Division’s vision includes the constant increasing of access to community services and supports and employment services/supports. Supporting transitions that occur not only from youth to adult but also throughout someone’s life and maintaining or increasing their independence throughout the course of their lives.
 - Will continue to support paying parents that providing services throughout.
 - Staff shortages: Transformation funds are available to help with this.
 - Changes with the Administrative Review (appeal) process. Turnaround time is quicker.
 - Will get a formal summary out soon for Consent Decree Workgroups. Have entered the implementation phase and working with court to see what can be implemented by March 31 deadline.
 - Residential options and capacity: Want to work on youth who are more difficult to find residential options for and be ready for them sooner rather than later and plan ahead. Need to build capacity for others such as in hospitals and going to step-down facilities.

LUNCH AND LEARN: Working While Disabled—Work Incentives Sessions

Registration Now Open!
Work Incentives sessions for SSI and SSDI Beneficiaries

Working with Benefits - Yes, You Can!

March 16, 2022, 12-1 pm

SSI Overview:

April 27, 2022, 12-1 pm

SSDI Overview:

May 18, 2022, 12-1 pm

Work Pays! An Introduction to Youth Work Incentives

April 6, 2022, 12-1 pm

ALL SESSIONS will be offered on Zoom with subtitles in English.



REGISTER ONLINE at <https://bit.ly/2KkUCVQ>

The Sherlock Center provides Work Incentive Information and Benefits Counseling services to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries and those that support them (family, guardian, rep payee, professionals). These sessions will be of value to anyone looking for a basic introduction to disability-related work incentives and/or has related questions. The Work and Benefits Introduction is for those starting to think about working and have general questions. The SSI or SSDI sessions provide details about the specific work incentives and other related information. All sessions provide an opportunity for you to ask questions about the following topics:

- Ticket to Work
- SSI or SSDI Work Incentives
- Resources about Work Incentive Information
- Access to Benefits Counseling
- Working and Impact on Health Insurance Medicaid/Medicare
- Other questions related to benefits and working

Upon registration please share your questions.

NOTE: These sessions will not address how to apply for SSI or SSDI benefits.

TIP: Unsure if you receive SSI or SSDI? You can confirm which benefit you have at <https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/>

Presented by Certified Work Incentives Counselors.

REGISTRATION IS LIMITED! Advance registration is required. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the session. You can access the session by computer, mobile device or listen using a cell or landline phone.

Accommodation requests or registration questions: Contact Elaine Sollecito at esollecito@ric.edu.

Session questions: Contact Vicki Ferrara at vferrara@ric.edu.



amos HOUSE

Employment & Training Program Application

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____ Social Security Number: _____

Gender: _____ Primary Language: _____

Contact Information for a close friend or family member where you can always be reached:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

I am interested in the following program(s):

Culinary Building Trades Customer Service CDL Job Search

How did you hear about Amos House's Education & Training Programs? _____

- Are you currently receiving SNAP benefits? Yes No
 - ***If no, would you like to apply? Yes No***
- Are you currently receiving cash assistance from DHS? Yes No
- Are you currently receiving GPA benefits from DHS? Yes No
- Do you have concerns about childcare? Yes No
- Do you have any concerns about transportation? Yes No
- I have been convicted of felonies /misdemeanors (please circle) Yes No
- I am currently on probation or parole Yes No
- I have been released from prison within the last 6 months Yes No

My education goal is: _____

My job goal is: _____

Please circle all that apply:

- I am interested in getting my high school diploma. Yes No
- I am interested in going to college. Yes No
- I am interested in job training programs. Yes No
- I currently have a job. Yes No
- I am unemployed, but would like to look for work. Yes No
- I have a job, but would like a better job. Yes No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

List any special skills or strengths: _____

Will you require any accommodations to attend and complete this training? _____

Education History

Last school attended: _____ Years: _____

Did you complete? (Degree/diploma/certificate): _____

Employment History (most recent job)

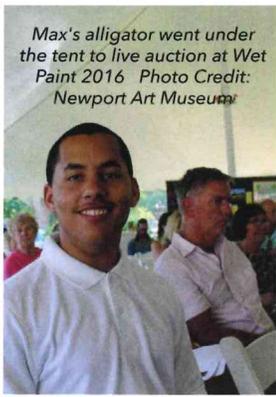
Employer Name: _____ Years: _____

Job Title: _____ Job Duties: _____

Do you have a resume? If yes, please attach.

Please briefly share why you would like to enroll in an Amos House employment or training program. Please include your job and career goals.

Please return applications to Amos House Education & Training Office, 460 Pine Street, 2nd Floor



Max's alligator went under the tent to live auction at Wet Paint 2016 Photo Credit: Newport Art Museum

LOOKING UPWARDS: SUPPORTING A LOCAL ARTIST

BY ASHLEY BENDIKSEN

In May of 2021, we were thrilled to spotlight Looking Upwards - an organization that supports and empowers adults and children with disabilities and diverse needs. This month, we'd like to share the story of an aspiring artist whom the agency is supporting to advance his career.

Meet artist, Max Giroux, a current resident of Middletown whose art enriches him personally as well as countless others. You see, Giroux doesn't just enjoy art as a hobby. He's been able to turn his passion for art into his life's work - from exhibitions to sales, and attracting collectors.

Giroux's love for art began at the age of two. His mother, Laura Giroux Hill, says art began as a sensory activity to assist with Giroux's autism. "It was something for him to fidget with, but then he moved quickly from Play-Doh right into modeling clay," she says. Specifically, Giroux began sculpting dinosaurs which his mother describes as Giroux's first love. In fact, his very first word was "Brontosaurus!"

By age eight, Giroux was constantly creating. "His sculpting encouraged conversations with his teachers and classmates. It really got him talking and socializing," Giroux's mother says. Then, at age twelve, she signed him up for a structured class. "It was a big stepping stone for us. We felt turned away by other programs, hearing he was autistic. The art museum was the opposite. That was when his art became more than a hobby," she says.

This, of course, was the Newport Art Museum where Giroux met artist and educator, Charlene Carpenzano. Carpenzano still serves as Giroux's mentor today. Reflecting on their

journey, she says, "My hope for Max as an adult is coming true, because he's becoming a working artist - because that's what he is."

Carpenzano has had a front row seat to all of it. "I met Max through an after-school class we offered at the museum. He developed beautiful hand building skills, and then he moved up as classes were more age appropriate," she says. Giroux's work was displayed in the museum's student exhibition for seven years.

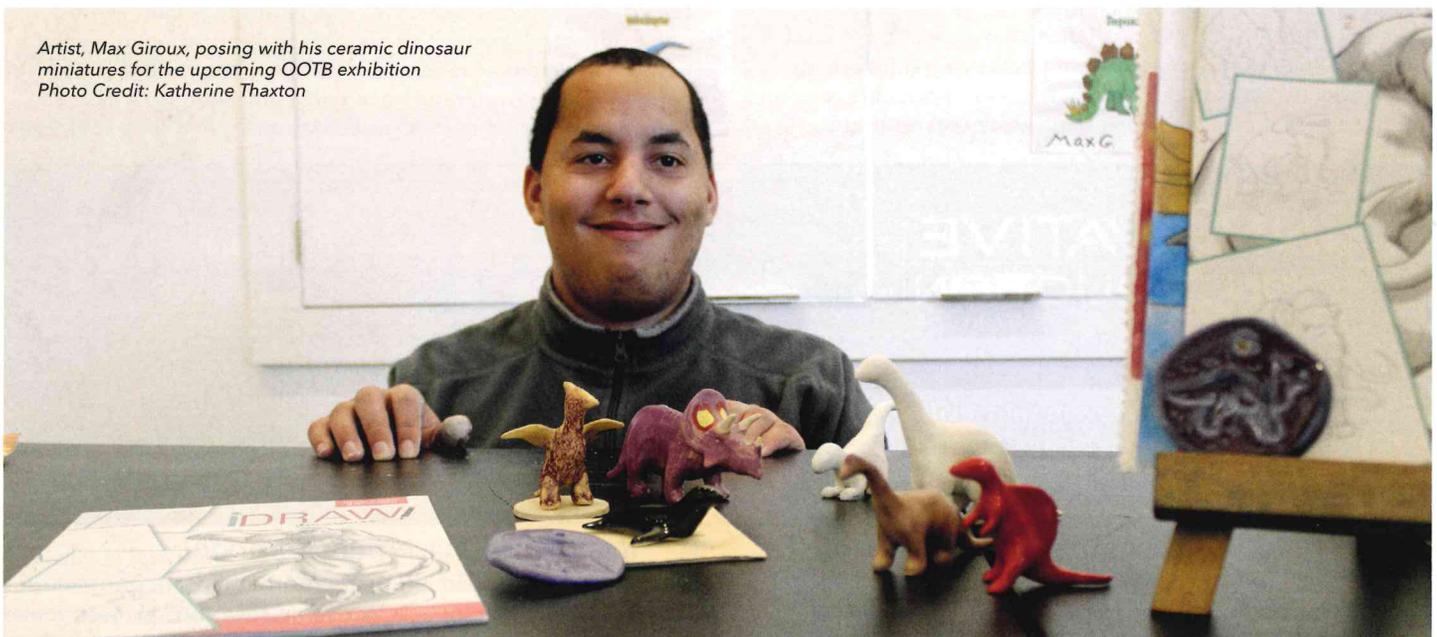
Yet, this was only the beginning. From 2014 to 2019, Giroux participated in the Faculty Student Holiday Marketplace, plus created bowls for the Rhode Island Food Bank Empty Bowls event. His work was also displayed in the South County Art Association EarthWorks juried exhibition during this time.

In 2016, Giroux's sculpted alligator was auctioned live "under the tent" at Wet Paint - the museum's major annual fundraiser. This is something reserved only for pieces with high interest in the silent auction. In 2017, three sculpted dinosaurs sold for \$1,000. Giroux's art was featured in Wet Paint the next two years, plus his work was displayed in the Museum of Work and Culture Through Our Eyes exhibition and the DeBlois Gallery classroom group exhibition.

"When Max works, you can see that he has a preconceived vision of what he's doing. As he's building, it's almost like he's referencing visual files that he has in his head," Carpenzano says. Much of this comes from Giroux's love for dinosaurs, history, and museums. He studies the fine details.

Today, at 25 years old, Giroux has been working with Looking Upwards for four years. The connection first began with Looking Upwards providing job coaching and employment support. Before the pandemic, Giroux worked at Newport Playhouse; he will soon begin a job at Clement's Marketplace in Portsmouth.

Val McHugh, who spearheads Looking Upwards' Small Business Incubator, has also been impressed by Giroux's art. "One of our projects is to support small businesses, and Max is one person we've started this with. We've asked ourselves, how do we support him in getting his sculptures out there and help him as an artist?"



Artist, Max Giroux, posing with his ceramic dinosaur miniatures for the upcoming OOTB exhibition Photo Credit: Katherine Thaxton

Max's collection of 3 dinosaurs sold for \$1,000 to support NAM Photo Credit: Newport Art Museum



This led to identifying Out of the Box Studio & Gallery (OOTB) in Jamestown as a potential partnership. Giroux submitted a proposal and was later accepted for an exclusive exhibit at the gallery for seven whole weeks.

Casey Weibust, Art Director at OOTB, is excited about the collaboration. "I only recently met Max and it's been really amazing to see how prolific he is with creating these amazing miniature sculptures," she says.

Weibust says the gallery provides a space for professional artists to display their work. When Giroux's proposal came through, they were intrigued at the idea of sculpture versus 2D art. Now, with Giroux's input, the entire exhibit will be something unique.

"It's been really fun brainstorming with Max. We plan to have tinted lights that will transform the whole space, making it like you're in Jurassic Park. Max has really great ideas - dinosaur sounds, having stuff projected onto the walls. It's been really fun to chat with him about this," Weibust says.

Weibust says there will be demonstrations as well. "It's almost like an art performance, how quick and accurate these sculptures are made," she says. "That's another beautiful part of Max's work is just watching Max create them."

When Giroux himself was asked how many sculptures he's created, he simply responded with, "A lot." In fact, 75 sculptures alone will be featured at OOTB. His mother estimates that Giroux has created thousands over the years.

"The very small part we play at Looking Upwards is walking

beside Max and supporting him in any way we can," says McHugh. "We're excited to be part of his path and to help him expand his art into Rhode Island, and even nationally and internationally, because there's nothing that should stop him from that."

Carpenzano adds, "Max has a gift as an artist, but Max also has a gift as a human being. He can come into a room and people might have the weight of life on their shoulders and Max always comes in with a smile. When you get a hello from Max, it changes your day. That ability to change someone's day is part of the gift that he has."

The exhibit opening is February 10th from 4:00-7:00pm at OOTB, located at 11 Clinton Avenue in Jamestown. The exhibit runs through March 31. www.lookingupwards.org

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