



# Community for All

Special Edition Summer 2020

## LARC News

### Special Edition

[www.litchfieldarc.org](http://www.litchfieldarc.org)

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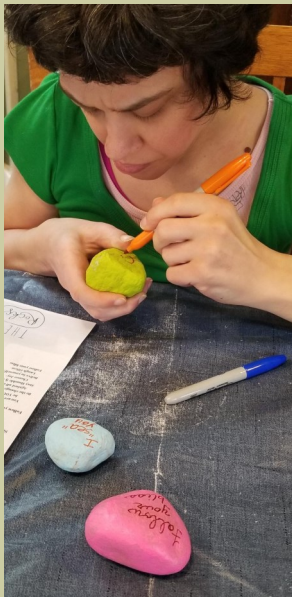
### It's back to business for LARC's Vocational programs

by Deb Aleksinas

They're back! After months of a mandated state shutdown of vocational programs due to the coronavirus pandemic, the return of participants to LARC's Group Supported Employment (GSE) program at the Putter Lane facility has begun.

On Monday, July 27, the first four-member team showed up for assembly work at the Putter Lane worksite under direction of their job coaches. In mid-August, a second crew of four workers also returned to GSE program on the opposite side of the Putter Lane facility. The two teams' return marked the smooth transition back to work for several individuals anxious to return to their jobs.

The reopening follows months of strategic planning and preparation by Marianne Sedgwick, Coordinator of Vocational Programs, and David Chamberlain, Community Worksite Coordinator, who worked in tandem with members of LARC's COVID-19 reopening committee. In addition to meeting weekly, committee members personally inspected each of LARC's locations to ensure strict adherence to health and safety protocols and guidelines.  
(continued on page 3)



Creating artful rocks with inspiring messages. See more on pg. 5.

### Keeping Everyone Connected

Across the country individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have faced great challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have suffered as a result of not receiving the support they are eligible to receive. Tragically, many have succumbed to the COVID-19 virus.

According to data collected from state and private research groups, people with developmental disabilities living in group homes "have some of the highest death rates from COVID-19 in the country." (*COVID-19 Infections And Deaths Are Higher Among Those With Intellectual Disabilities*, June 9, 2020 by Joseph Shapiro, NPR).

Not, thankfully, at LARC! Since the very early days of the pandemic, LARC staff were voicing concern about the potential for infection among individuals residing in LARC group homes. As the State of Connecticut and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) continued to issue updated guidelines for preventing infection and spread, staff had to pivot to implement new procedures to ensure they and the individuals in their care were practicing the most recent preventative measures. And implementing guidelines wasn't always easy particularly when the required personal protective equipment (PPE) was in short supply. LARC staff persevered 24/7 and as a result, individuals residing in LARC group homes remain virus free! (continued on page 3)

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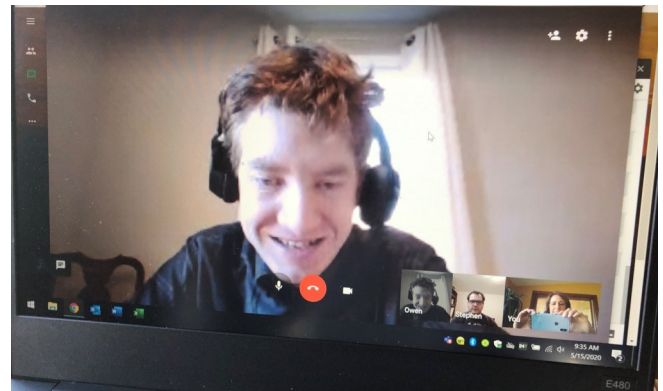
Executive Director  
 Michael Menard, Ph.D.

This special edition speaks volumes about the amount and quality of work expended over the last five months by LARC staff as we all navigated our way during these unprecedented times! I've been astonished on a daily basis with the abundance of talent and dedication exhibited by so many. It's not a reach to say that COVID-19 has disrupted all of our lives. Not only have we had to make major adjustments in our professional lives but in our personal lives as well. Learning to work remotely involved significant changes to not only the job but to how it would fit into our home lives. You will see in the articles provided in this edition how staff stepped up to meet the challenges. We persevered, made it work, and learned new ways to improve the lives of the people we serve. I'm so proud of the agency and looking forward to taking advantage of new opportunities to broaden our vision of *Community for All* and make it a reality for many more people!

Michael Menard, Ph.D., Executive Director, LARC

## PROJECT SEARCH Team embraces tech

Project SEARCH interns, Owen Reidy and Stephen Smith, continue to make progress in the program and have adapted to the changes caused by the pandemic. Due to COVID 19, internships at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital were suspended in March. As a result, the program was implemented "virtually" on line. Utilizing Google Classroom and Google Hangouts, interns were able to continue the instructional component of the program. Owen and Stephen worked on keeping their employability skills sharp such as interview skills, workplace etiquette, looking professional and getting paid. Both interns also improved their computer skills and adapted well to the new program. They are hoping to resume the program at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital in the fall, and possibly be joined by a few more interns. The team has been reading the CHH newsletter online to stay connected with their host business and look forward to working with them again in the future!



Owen Reidy on line with Google Classroom.

According to Owen Reidy, though meeting online is quite different from class, it's "starting to get easier." Owen noted that he has "learned new math skills using websites online."

Stephen Smith confirmed that he's "enjoyed it and learned a lot. I know we are not together but I enjoy Zoom classes," he added.

Kathy Riberdy, Project Search coordinator and special educator noted that she's "so proud of how Owen and Stephen have adjusted and stayed positive during this time. They have increased their computer skills and are pros at emailing!"

***It's back to business*** (continued from pg. 1) While the workers are back to business assembling automobile headrest components for ITW, it is not exactly business as usual. Strict COVID-19 protocols and safety precautions have been put into place to ensure safety of individuals and staff. The pandemic has also initially reduced the volume of program participants.

The reopening preceded months of preparation and communication by program managers to make sure that individuals -- and their families/caregivers -- felt comfortable with returning to work under new guidelines and expectations. All those returning must be able to tolerate wearing facial coverings for their full shift and be able to follow social distancing rules at all times while at program and during transport.

Extensive planning also went into ensuring that the worksite was properly prepared to allow for enhanced protocols regarding social distancing, transportation, cleaning/sanitizing of LARC's facilities, and institution of health checks upon arrival. The worksite occupancy ratio has also been greatly reduced.

In an effort to reduce risk of cross-contamination should an individual or staff present with illness, teams are required to arrive and work in separate sides of the building, as well as exit through separate areas. (continued on pg. 6)

### ***Keeping everyone connected*** (continued from page 1)

But keeping individuals safe wasn't the only challenge that staff faced. Adjusting to face masks and staying 6 feet apart took time but it was the sudden loss of their daily routines that many found most difficult. LARC had to close its Day Service Option program and the Vocational program was mostly shuttered as many worksites closed. All of a sudden, individuals were no longer able to attend their regular day program or go to their jobs. Staff were concerned about the loss of routine and opportunities for individuals to connect with each other, their friends and co-workers. Virtual services such as GoToMeeting and Zoom were becoming the new way to work throughout the country. LARC staff saw the opportunities virtual tech presented and educated themselves on how to use the various functions to interact with individuals and co-workers.

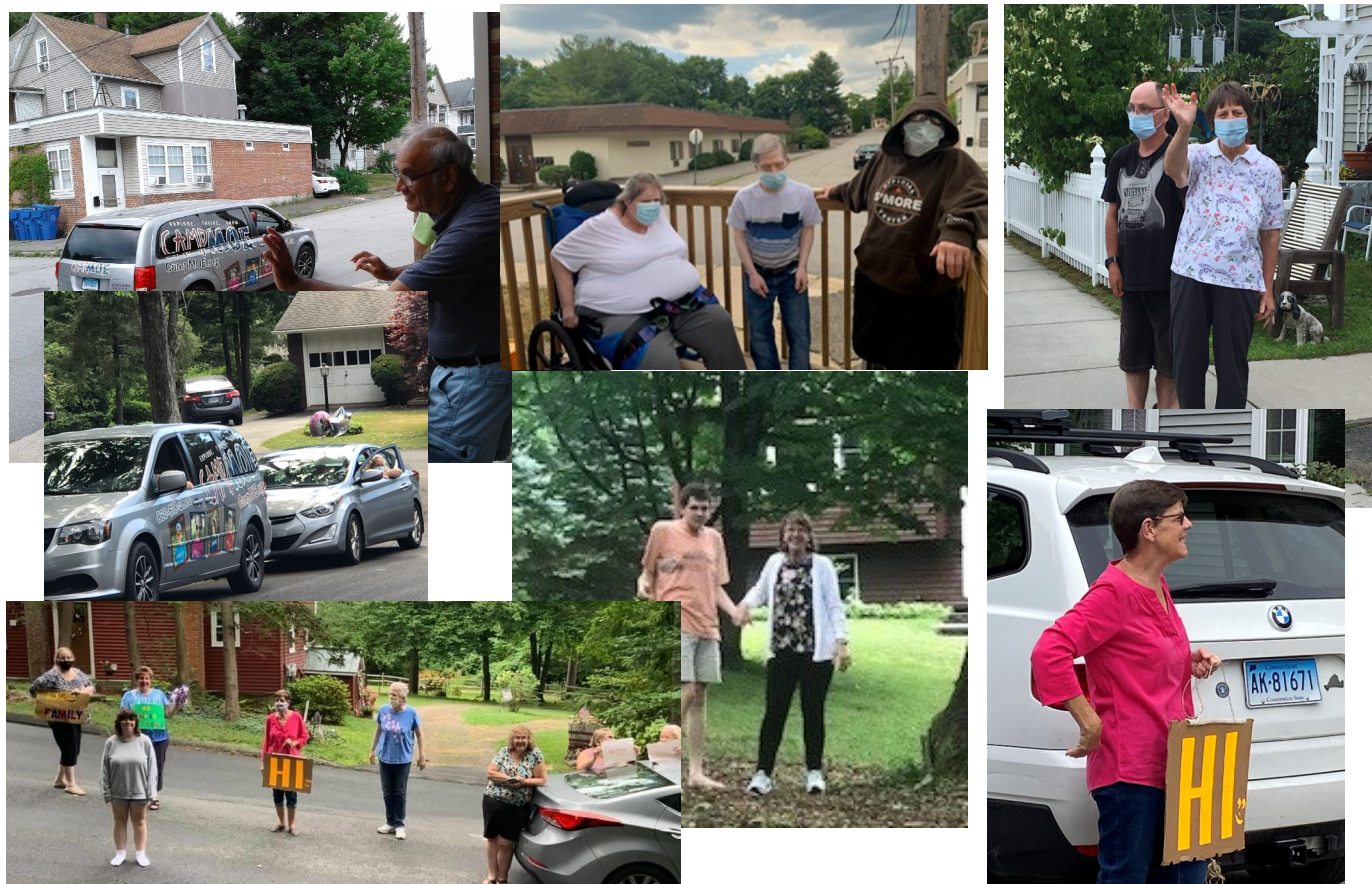
Jill Sahlin, a member of LARC's Clinical Team, was at the forefront of LARC's collective and collaborative efforts to stay connected with individuals. "We worked together to find ways to stay engaged -- whether during our virtual meetings where we provided program services, counseling and support, and phone or FaceTime calls to check in." Other activities that were offered and continue to keep individuals engaged include art projects, story time, virtual travel, exercise sessions and festive parades. The staff even organized a drive-by graduation celebration to acknowledge accomplishments of LARC's Transition Program students.

Staff continue to learn and expand the programming offered virtually. As the agency slowly starts to reopen and bring individuals back to Vocational worksites and day programs, staff continue to create new ways to connect and interact. According to Jill, "Learning to navigate through the challenges of living and working amidst a pandemic has not been an easy task for any one of us. I work with people who are truly amazing in their capacity to give and I am lucky to have developed so many positive relationships with individuals whom we support." And even though the virus has kept staff and individuals physically separated, the virtual services and parades have brought about meaningful connections. "Even though we are not able to be together right now, the moments we spend together are what bring me joy during these otherwise uncertain times. Seeing the warmth of a smile, being able to chat with and offer reassurances to individuals makes us all see that we are not alone. We are still part of the same LARC family," Jill confirmed.



## LARC Parades bring joy!

LARC held two parades over the summer months, both of which were a great success. The first parade, which took place in June, set off from 314 Main Street and proceeded on a route which included nine locations where individuals cheered and waved enthusiastically as the vehicles drove by. The second parade held in July added many more locations where the excitement was evident. This was a wonderful idea and enabled many individuals to see LARC friends while staying safe.



## Assistive Technology advances at LARC

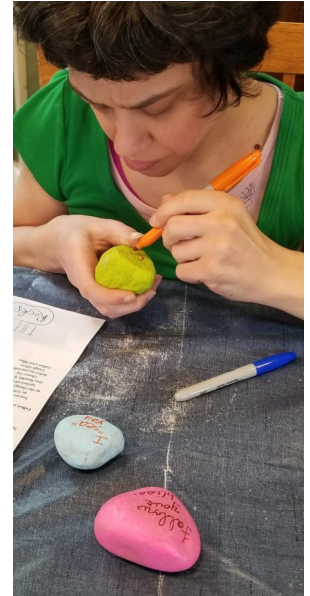
Lisa Francis, a member of LARC's Clinical Team, has completed 15 Professional Development hours through the Assistive Technology Academy with Mike Marotta, RESNA Certified ATP President, Inclusive Technology Solutions, LLC.

Lisa shared some of what she learned as well as how it will help her use assistive technology in her job. Besides learning the assessment process, she practiced the Self-Environment-Tasks-Tools (SETT) framework, and learned about the long-term implementation of assistive technology use. The course, according to Lisa, "was designed to promote building upon the technology you have rather than the push to keep purchasing new technology." Lisa will be using what she has learned to help individuals reach their desired outcome. The training also taught her about using "creative solutions to break through physical and environmental barriers." Congratulations, Lisa!

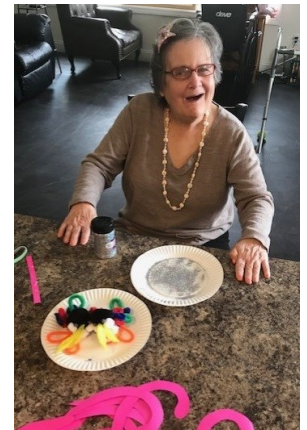


## Art and more through virtual tech

Virtual instruction led by LARC's DSO, Clinical, and Social Enrichment staff continues to keep individuals busy and productive in response to restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Residential staff are accessing virtual programming and assisting individuals in a variety of art projects including rock painting, mobile creation, and pasta art. Other activities have included dancing, story telling and virtual trips around the globe. LARC's first annual ART FEST, held this summer, was very popular with 58 entries submitted from individuals in LARC programs. Four LARC Board members, Ruth Dwyer, Sarah Dziedzic, Tim Waldron, and Kim Brown, participated in the selection of 12 entries that best aligned with the 12 categories created by the ART FEST committee. Those 12 entries will be showcased on a 2021 calendar, which will be available for purchase. Please email Meg McGinn at [mmcginn@litchfieldarc.org](mailto:mmcginn@litchfieldarc.org) for more information about the calendars.



Access the ARTFEST presentation at [www.litchfieldarc.org](http://www.litchfieldarc.org) and click on ARTFEST!



## LARC's Annual Spring Wine Tasting...

As we were gearing up for another fabulous wine tasting this past March, little did we know that the event would be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were so immensely thankful when many of the sponsors and supporters of the event told us to keep the sponsorship funds even though the event was cancelled! Many others sent in checks for sponsorships they had committed to but had yet to send in. The donations made it possible for LARC to carry on in the face of so many challenges and disruptions, and cancellations of important fundraisers and events! THANK YOU to all the heroes who are helping us create joy and purpose for our program participants everyday!



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***It's back to business*** (cont. from pg. 3) Some participants are opting to not return to the work program until later stages of the COVID reopening plan, many of whom are utilizing virtual programming in the interim, noted Chamberlain. In addition, he said, "Some businesses will not be having us back," at least for the time being, either due to reduction in their workforce or because they lack adherence to state-mandated PPE requirements or adequate space for safe social distancing of program participants.

On the other hand, several GSE worksites in the community have been up and running since the pandemic started, including a small cleaning team at the Canaan State Police Barracks. In addition, re-work inspectors have returned to Becton Dickinson (BD) in Canaan, and work groups recently started back up at Hubbell, American Collar and Sterling Engineering.

Meanwhile, about a dozen individuals employed competitively at various businesses in the region have not missed a beat in terms of working throughout the pandemic.

Individuals hired by Seitz, Stop & Shop, PriceRite, Market32, Sterling Sintered Technologies, East Coast Lightning Equipment, Valerie Manor and Sharon Farms Market have been reporting for duty day in and day out with support and guidance from job coaches Lori Harris and Celeste Turner. These workers have successfully learned and adapted to new COVID-19 protocols mandated by their employers regarding required PPE, social distancing, workplace changes, customer support and strict hygiene protocols.

As the months progress and as state COVID-19 guidelines and monitoring allow for additional phase-in periods, the goal is to carefully and safely welcome individuals back not only to GSE programs, but also their long-awaited return to DSO (Day Service Option) programs throughout the agency, a process which has already begun at LARC's Main Street facility.



**THANK YOU** to our entire community of heroes who responded to a call for help during these unprecedented times. Your support has enabled LARC to create and sustain meaningful and impactful programs and activities that are making a tremendous difference in the lives of the individuals in LARC programs as well as their families, guardians, and loved ones.



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### Grants & Donations

Torrington Savings Bank Foundation—grant to purchase Chromebooks for staff on the frontlines

Eversource Foundation—grant to purchase personal protective equipment

JoAnn Fabrics, Torrington—donation of fabric and assembled face masks

Lakeville Interiors—donation of 30 cloth masks

Torrington Distributors, Inc.—donation of 150 face masks

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Our vision, **Community for All**, strives to achieve inclusion for all individuals.

The principles which have guided LARC in its delivery of programs since 1964 are individual empowerment, choice, respect and dignity.

**COMMUNITY FOR ALL**