



LARC News Winter 2021

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An incredibly important project

In November, LARC announced that a new autism resource center would be created and developed at the agency's 314 Main Street address to provide guidance and resources for children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families. Thanks to start-up funds from the Robert Rosenheim Foundation, the work of this important initiative will begin in January 2021.



Diane Libby, Robert Rosenheim Foundation board member with Michael Menard, Executive Director of LARC.

With the hiring of Kathy Riberdy, a Special Education Teacher and Consultant, the work will begin in early January. Over the next six months, Kathy will work to prepare the space for the various activities and programming planned for the resource center.

LARC's Autism Resource Center will be created and developed in three Phases. Kathy will be responsible for Phase 1 which will include designing and furnishing the space, establishing a database, arranging workshops with specialists in Autism Spectrum Disorder and paving the way for the permanent Center Director. The recruitment for that position will take place over the next several months. (continued on pg. 3)



More photos from Project Search graduation inside!

A shot of hope during the pandemic: BD has key role in global vaccination effort

By Deb Aleksinas

Now that COVID-19 vaccinations are being rolled out throughout Connecticut, chances are that the syringe that will be used to deliver that shot in your arm is produced by one of LARC's Vocational Department corporate partners: BD (Becton, Dickinson and Company).

BD has a major role in the Federal government's Operation Warp Speed Vaccination Program. The global medical technology company, which is headquartered in Franklin Lakes, N.J., but has a massive manufacturing plant in North Canaan, has finalized an initial pandemic order for 50 million needles and syringes that were delivered by the end of December 2020 to support the U.S. vaccination effort for the novel coronavirus. (continued on page 2)

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Happy New Year!

It is with great optimism that LARC welcomes in 2021! There is so much good news at the agency. Two new members of the leadership team joined the agency a couple of months ago and are settling in their respective roles. Jocelyn Dunlap, interim director of the Residential Program and Jennifer Hull, interim director of Vocational and Day Programs have been hard at work, over the past couple of months, getting to know their teams and addressing some of the challenges of providing services and supports during a pandemic. Both come to LARC with extensive experience in their fields. We are very fortunate to have them here at LARC. Project SEARCH celebrated the graduation of two student interns at the end of December and plans are underway for creating and developing LARC's Autism Resource Center. There is much to celebrate and we are looking forward to a great new year!

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

A shot of hope during the pandemic:

(continued from page 1)

BD has also committed to developing new manufacturing lines for injection devices that will provide priority access to the U.S. government for hundreds of millions of syringes and needles to support current and future pandemic vaccination efforts, according to a press release issued by the company.

"BD's commitment to produce 50 million vaccine injection devices" by the end of 2020, "is the latest effort in the company's multifaceted global response to this virus, and the new, strategic public-private partnership will help ensure the U.S. is prepared for future pandemic vaccination efforts," said Rick Byrd, president of Medication Delivery Solutions for BD.

LARC has been partnering with BD/Canaan for the past five years. A small group of workers under the guidance of a job coach has been performing inspection/rework at the North Canaan plant.

BD is the largest manufacturer of injection devices in the world, producing billions of syringes and needles annually through its global manufacturing network. In addition to the U.S., BD has received pandemic orders from other countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom.



An incredibly important project (continued from page 1)

The timing for the kick off of Phase 1 was perfect in that Kathy will have the next six months to devote to Phase 1 of the project before returning to her role as Program Coordinator of LARC's Project SEARCH, which will start up again in late summer 2021. For the past year, Kathy implemented the Project SEARCH program, overseeing two student interns who worked in various departments at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. The students both graduated in December. Kathy is well prepared for the tasks at hand. She is a Special Education Teacher and Consultant with previous teaching experience at a variety of school districts including, Avon, West Hartford, and Canton. "I have had the opportunity to teach individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder ranging from pre-Kindergarten through young adult. I believe it is vital to create trusting relationships while providing resources and support to students and families to achieve success. I'm excited to assist in launching this innovative program for LARC and families."

"We believe that the Autism Resource Center will be a great asset to the community for families preparing their sons and daughters for competitive employment and living independently in the community."

Michael Menard, LARC Executive Director

Phase 2 will include the launch of a high school program. Services will include assistance with homework, counseling for teens, as well as a comfortable space for students to relax and socialize with peers. Special activities will be offered in a variety of disciplines including cooking, music, and art therapy.

Phase 3 will offer comprehensive preparation for employment, assistance with independent living, financial planning and more. The goal is to have Phase 3 fully operational in three years.

According to Michael Menard, LARC Executive Director, "We have witnessed over the last several years an increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Though LARC has provided services over the years to individuals with autism in our Transitions, Vocational, Residential and summer camp programs, the agency has not provided a comprehensive program. We believe that the Autism Resource Center will be a great asset to the community for families preparing their sons and daughters for competitive employment and living independently in the community." During the past several years LARC has worked with area high schools, providing transition services for students. The resource center will build and expand on these services to meet a broader need for students with ASD and their families.

"We are excited to be a part of funding this important resource for our community," said Diane Libby, Robert Rosenheim Foundation board member. LARC is securing additional funding from the community to support the entire three-year project with the goal of developing sustainable funding sources for the center. For more information, contact Mary Ellen Kunz, mkunz@litchfieldarc.org.

Project SEARCH interns graduate

Project SEARCH proudly graduated LARC's first class of interns on December 22, 2020. In addition to a presentation of certificates, friends and family participated in a car parade to honor interns, Owen Reidy & Stephen Smith, on graduating from Project SEARCH. They successfully completed the program while learning employability skills, independent living skills & participated in internships at CHH. Executive Director of LARC, Michael Menard, and CHH VP, Brian Mattiello, presented diplomas, gifts & congratulations to Owen and Stephen. Enthusiastic well wishers drove by in decorated cars, honking & cheering. Stephen summed up the experience by saying "This was the best day of my life!" These interns are ready for employment!



LARC officially launched this nationwide program last January at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH). This innovative and successful program is sponsored by LARC and Department of Developmental Services and hosted by CHH. Project Search is an employment program which provides classes in employability skills, independent living skills and internship experience to individuals with disabilities. Upon graduation, the goal is to acquire competitive employment.

Interns, Owen Reidy and Stephen Smith, have successfully completed the program and are anxious to get to work. After pausing in March due to COVID-19 and moving to online programming, Project SEARCH resumed in September back at CHH. These interns were welcomed into several departments throughout the year and mentored by experienced CHH staff. Owen completed his internship at Cardiac Rehabilitation at the Winsted Health Center with mentor, Lynn Zarzycki. In addition to learning how to thoroughly sanitize the exercise machines, weights, and all surfaces for patients, Owen also learned how to use a blood pressure cuff and apply heart monitors. The patients appreciated his assistance and looked forward to seeing him. At CHH, Owen assembled COVID-19 specimen bags for the testing center and restocked inventory for the Emergency Department Storage Room. Owen also learned food prep and cleaning skills in Nutritional Services and filing skills in Human Resources. "I've improved my math skills and the skills I learned helped me to apply for jobs," said Owen. (continued on page 5)

New members of Leadership Team

Jennifer Hull joined LARC on October 19 as the agency's new Interim Director of Services. In this role, Jennifer will provide leadership to the Day and Vocational programs here at the agency. Jennifer has more than twenty years of experience with both vocational and day programs—as a direct support professional, manager, and director. She has extensive experience in program design and implementation, and will make an invaluable addition to our team.

Jocelyn Dunlap started at LARC as Interim Director of Residential Services on December 9. Most recently, Jocelyn was at MARC Community Resources, in Middletown—and she has many years of experience leading residential units.

Project Search (continued from page 4)

Stephen Smith enjoyed his internship at Podiatry under mentor, Tracy Hall. He greeted patients and escorted them to exam rooms. Stephen has learned how to safely transport patients in wheelchairs, to and from Podiatry. He “turns over” patient rooms efficiently, sanitizes surface and re-stocks medical supplies. In his previous internship at Cardiovascular Medicine, Stephen learned how to file and pull patient records while confirming with date of birth. He “turned over” patient rooms, cleaned the waiting rooms and performed recycling. “Project SEARCH has meant a lot to me,” Stephen explained. “The experience has taught me to be more confident about myself”.

The Project SEARC Program will start up again in September. “This has been an incredible experience,” said Michael Menard, LARC Executive Director. “I’m incredibly proud of the team, including Kathy Riberdy, Special Educator and Project SEARCH Coordinator. This has been a tremendously valuable experience for Owen, Stephen, and the entire team.”

We are truly appreciative of everyone involved with the program,” Menard noted. Host Liaisons, Pam Tino, Communications and Community Development, and Shelli Rhoads, Volunteer Manager, have been instrumental in securing internships and supporting the program.

Kathy Riberdy, Special Educator and Project SEARCH Coordinator is “proud of these hard-working individuals. I

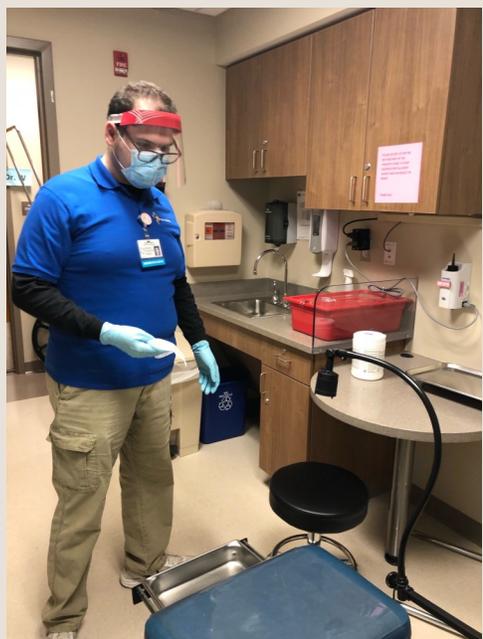
look forward to seeing this program grow and assist more individuals reach their goals of competitive employment and acquiring independent living skills. Everyone we’ve worked with at CHH has been supportive, encouraging and welcoming of these interns and this program”.

Skills trainer, Cora Lynn, joined the program this fall and supports interns in their departments when needed. Cora said, “I am extremely excited about what the future holds for Owen and Stephen, as well as for Project SEARCH.”

Best wishes to Owen and Stephen as they apply to positions and use these valuable employment skills.



Owen Reidy, Project Search intern, preparing for one of the day’s assignments.



Stephen Smith, Project Search intern, on the job at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital.



Owen Reidy assembling COVID-19 specimen bags for the testing center.



The Project Search Team: (left to right) Kathy Riberdy, Special Educator and Project Search Coordinator, with interns Stephen Smith and Owen Reidy, and Skills Trainer, Cora Lynn.



Owen Reidy and Stephen Smith with CHH VP, Brian Mattiello, on graduation day at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital.

Recently awarded grants

Thomaston Savings Bank Foundation \$2,500, and **Thomaston Savings Bank**, \$500 in support of the purchase of training software that enables staff to complete required training online and on demand

Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation, \$5,000 in support of the purchase of training software for online and on demand

Robert Rosenheim Foundation, \$150,000 in support of the creation and development of LARC's Autism Resource Center

Connecticut Community Foundation and **United Way of Greater Waterbury**, \$7,820 for the purchase of lap tops for remote workers

Special Olympics at LARC

By Robin Pedone, LARC Social Enrichment & Special Olympics coordinator

Due to the COVID-19 virus, Special Olympic Connecticut decided in June 2020 to cancel the statewide Bocce Tournament, which was to take place at Scalzi Park in Stamford the weekend of September 12th.

The LARC Special Olympic Bocce Team decided we would have our own competition.

It was held on Saturday, September 19, a sunny but cold day at the bocce area at Tall Timbers, Home of Camp MOE. Only family members and staff were invited to this competition due to COVID-19 restrictions.



The group has been practicing weekly since July. There were three practice sessions with up to 8 people practicing on two bocce courts. The group worked on their skills getting their bocce ball closest to the pallina for points. It was a round robin tournament with two divisions of a maximum of 4 teams in each division. Each team played against others in their division until they lost two games. There were a couple of teams that played at least 3 times against each other.

Everyone was a winner! Athletes/unified partners, referees, volunteers, and all spectators took home a reusable green shopping bag imprinted with *LARC Bocce Tournament September 2020*.

Approximately seventy percent of the athletes from the LARC Special Olympic program participate in at least two sports a year. We are always looking for more athletes and volunteers. Please contact Robin Pedone at LARC, (860)489-2140 ext. 202 or email at: rpedone@litchfieldarc.org for more information and forms that need to be completed before starting the first practice.

Clinical Team welcomes Breia Eggleston, R.N.

LARC's Clinical team is pleased to have Breia Eggleston, RN, join the team. LARC has wanted to hire a nurse for many years. Breia had worked as a nurse for DDN Consulting Services in some of LARC's residential homes.

Breia brings experience, knowledge, and an overall understanding of the individuals LARC serves. She is a great addition to our organization," confirmed Julie Stachowiak, Director of Clinical Services. "We are excited to be working with her again."

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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