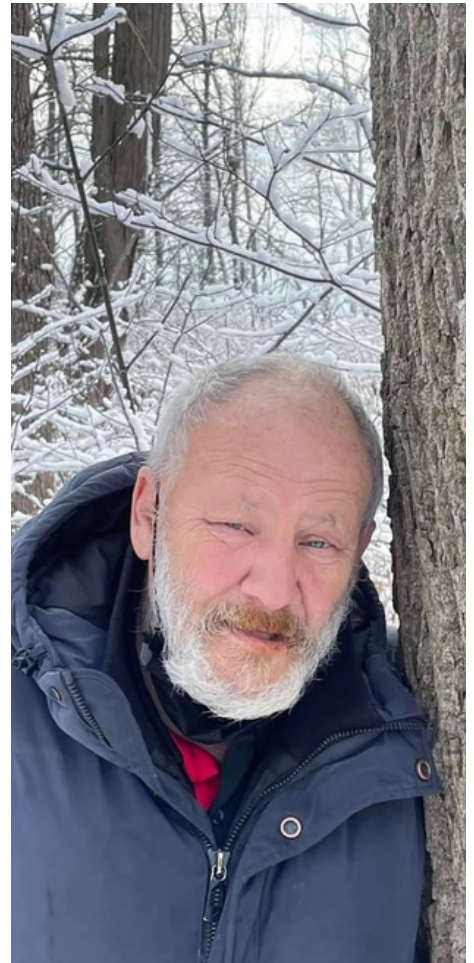


# HAPPENINGS

WE BELIEVE IN PEOPLE



## A MESSAGE FROM ALEXANDRA

WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION OF HAPPENINGS!

In this publication, we look forward to sharing highlights over the last few months and celebrating our most recent achievements.

CLO (Community Living Oakville) is committed to the quality of supports and services of each individual person. We are always looking ahead, challenging ourselves to think bigger and expand our partnerships; in order to provide enriched opportunities for people we support.

This commitment was reinforced at the start of the year, when we welcomed CQL (The Council on Quality and Leadership) onsite for another accreditation review. After three years of being accredited, it was time to assess our progress to date, celebrate and identify new goals. CQL aligns with our mission and vision as they promote excellence in person-centered services and supports that lead to increased quality of life. Through their support, we have been successful in reinforcing organizational systems that translate from policy to practice and positively impact people receiving services.

During their four-day visit, our teams and people supported highlighted many proud moments such as: sharing our enhanced rights trainings, policies and practices, data collection in order to identify trends and make improvements, as well as ways in which we ensure the best possible health for each person supported. Assessors further met with various focus groups to collect information and provide insightful feedback. Overall, it was an engaging and informative process that led to another successful three-year accreditation term.

Congratulations to everyone for your hard work and efforts in achieving accreditation! To hear more about this exciting news, we encourage you to read our Quality Enhancement Accreditation article on page 4.

In reflecting on our goals, CLO consistently strives to enhance communication as well as engagement with our stakeholders and the broader community. As a result, we have also been actively developing a marketing plan to share more of who we are and what we do as an agency. We encourage you to stay tuned and follow our social media networks [@communitylivingoakville](https://www.facebook.com/communitylivingoakville), as well as join in on our campaigns and share with your friends and family.

Be sure to participate in our current 'Tagline Campaign' via our social media channels until March 31st, 2023. Your tagline might be the one chosen to represent the people we support and CLO!

We hope you enjoy the stories and updates shared in this issue.



With warm regards,

Alexandra Hoeck-Murray  
Executive Director

## CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST



Last December, Ritorno brought the Christmas spirit and cheer for the people supported by Community Living Oakville and Project Autism Canada.

Julia Hanna and her elves prepared a delicious breakfast followed by a visit from Santa. Our team had an absolute blast – thank you Ritorno! ! Oakville is blessed to have such a dedicated and committed community partner!



## TRAILBLAZER: MARGARET SUTTON 1926-2022

On November 19th, 2022 Community Living Oakville lost one of its longstanding members, Mrs. Margaret Sutton. Mrs. Sutton and her husband, Gerry Sutton, dedicated their lives to making a difference in the lives of people who have a developmental disability. Mr. and Mrs. Sutton were influential in getting Community Living Oakville to where it is today. In the mid-eighties, their son Brian moved into his home, supported by Community Living Oakville.

Mrs. Sutton was not only a dedicated and loving mother, but she also volunteered with Community Living Oakville over the years, including the women's auxiliary. Together with other families of people supported, Mrs. Sutton provided support, resources and hope to families and people with developmental disabilities. Mrs. Sutton: We thank you for your tireless efforts, unwavering commitment, and selfless dedication to the cause, which has helped to lay the foundation for this organization and has impacted the lives of so many.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. on Friday, March 31, 2023, at Kopriva Taylor Community Funeral Home, 64 Lakeshore Road West in Oakville. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to The Oakville Foundation For Intellectually Handicapped People, 2793 Huntington Trail, Oakville L6J 7G7.

# ACCREDITATION



In September of 2019, Community Living Oakville embarked on the journey of Accreditation with The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). This was CLO's first time at making a commitment to transformation and development with an organization that specialized in Accreditation in Developmental Services. In 2019, CLO achieved its first 3-year Quality Assurance Accreditation. Armed with a comprehensive Accreditation Report that noted our strengths and opportunities for growth and improvement, we had a great tool to help build our strategic plan to create a vision of all that we wanted to accomplish in the next three years.

Fast forward to February 2023, with the support of our Executive Director and the Board of Directors, it was time to make the commitment again. In the months leading up to our accreditation date, much planning and preparation occurred, including the completion of a self-assessment of our organization. People supported, Direct Support Professionals and the Management team worked together in small groups (referred to as factor groups) to collect and share information, as well as to gain insightful perspectives.

The Accreditation week started with a Kick-Off event hosted by Jennifer Dance, Manager of Quality Enhancement, that highlighted all the hard work that has happened in the last three and a half years. After an inspiring introduction from Alexandra Hoeck-Murray, Executive Director, the people that we support were at the forefront of our presentation. We heard from Kaitlin, talking about her role as a Board Member with Community Living Oakville. Marty and

Ronald shared their story of building their natural support as brothers both supported by CLO. We heard from Shannon who shared her journey of going through the Pre-Employment program and ultimately gaining competitive employment with Fortinos. Harrison was able to share all the exciting adventures he has been on and Cody was amazing at presenting how being a part of the hiring process and choosing his own staff, has had a profound impact on his life. Andrea Interior, Development Manager, shared how fundraising dollars were vital in ensuring that people could attain outcomes that were important to them. In closing, Jenny Parisi, Director of Services and Quality Enhancement, was able to share how the transformation of day services went from a site-based segregated day program to community based, giving people choice and autonomy over their days and supporting people to build meaningful relationships in their community. What better way to end the kick-off than with an uplifting slide show ([click here to view](#)) and a rousing musical performance by Annie and Ryan of Massive Tank Studios, for which they received two standing ovations.

Throughout the Accreditation week, all of the Basic Assurances were reviewed, again with the people we support at the forefront of the conversation. We presented challenges and brainstormed creative ideas to overcome these challenges. The three Quality Enhancement Specialists from CQL, gained insight into CLO by conducting focus groups with People Supported, Direct Support Professionals, Managers and Families. CQL also reviewed organizational data and our Quality Outcomes Plan.

After a busy week, we were presented with another 3-year Quality Assurance Accreditation! CQL provided a report that highlighted our Strengths and Opportunities, and we are now tasked with creating a new three-year plan to continually improve the quality of supports we provide and improve the quality of life for people receiving those supports.

We could not be prouder of the work that we have done in the last three and half years and we look forward to the opportunity of setting strategic priorities to continue to improve supports that we offer to our community.

"CQL is so excited for the opportunity to continue the partnership with CLO as they participated in their second Quality Assurances® accreditation. The week was a culmination, and celebration, of the hard work that CLO has done as part of their unique quality journey to provide each person to live active, rewarding and fulfilling lives in the community. CLO is truly invested in The Basic Assurances® and using Personal Outcome Measure® data to enhance supports and services for all people. People Supported, family members and stakeholders of CLO participated in all parts of the accreditation process. It very was evident that CLO is committed to living its mission, vision and core values."

– Kristen Heichel  
Lead Quality Enhancement Specialist, CQL



## WHAT IS CQL?

For 50 years, CQL, The Council on Quality and Leadership has been a leader in working with human service organizations and systems to continuously define, measure, and improve quality of life and quality of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, older adults, and children and youth.

## WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

A common understanding of the term accreditation involves the formal recognition of an organization for attaining a specified set of standards, often viewed as merely "passing a test." CQL's Accreditation approach is more about being on a journey toward ongoing organizational transformation. Rather than receiving a "passing score," it is about choosing the right path and making measurable progress. At CQL they often say they meet organizations where they are and help them move to a better place. Accreditation pushes us past regulatory / compliance standards.



## ART FROM THE HEART

The Art from the Heart Exhibition, featuring artists supported by Community Living Oakville, opened on February 14, 2023 at the Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre. Artists, their families and members of the community attended the opening to view the inspiring artwork. Over the past months, artists attended weekly classes where they were provided the opportunity and tools to express themselves through their art using various mediums.

YourTV Halton interviewed CLO live at the open house exhibit - [check out their feature here.](#)

The exhibition is open to the public until March 19, 2023; please stop by Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre to experience the talent and immerse yourself in the creative vision of each artist.



## A MUSICAL JOURNEY - RYAN'S STORY

In the past I have been given the opportunity to write articles about many of my amazing students and how they have shared with me different experiences that I have felt worth sharing. I have always struggled to do justice in recounting what these incredible people have shown me and tried to be as articulate as possible with regard to what I have learned from those experiences. This time round I have been asked to write about how I became involved with CLO and why I do what I do for the agency. It will now be my best effort to show the gratitude I feel for CLO while giving as much insight as possible into the good times, the bad times and why I am so very proud to work for this incredible organization.

I always knew that I wanted to do music for a living as I never had any kind of “plan b.” I studied at the University of Toronto where I received my Bachelor’s degree in performance on Classical Guitar.

My teacher, Eli Kassner was one of the kindest men I’ve ever known and maintained a quiet brilliance. You simply knew by the air in the room that you were standing with a truly great man and he simply made you want to be better - at everything. After university I spent a lot of time playing in bands around the city and working on my craft as a teacher. After about ten years I opened my own business and named it Massive Tank Studios, which is a name bestowed upon me by a friend making light of my past experiences in competitive bodybuilding combined with my past/current struggle with reaching anything placed on a high shelf.

### QUOTES FROM PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

*“I like Ryan and seeing him at music because I like the Carpenters band and he teaches me how to play the Carpenters. Ryan is a nice man.”*

*“He’s good. He’s awesome. I want to go back every day with Ryan because I like the drums. He’s a good guy.”*

*“For my birthday and Christmas I always get a Diet Coke, no ice, from Ryan.”*

*“I like singing with Ryan. He’s funny”*

*“I enjoy listening to music and singing along. Ryan always listens and is patient and always willing to play “Ring of Fire” which I ask him to play 20 times.”*

A very good friend of mine once told me that “there is the person you are before ‘it’ happens and then there is the person you are after ‘it’ happens.” On December 11th, 2012 my two sons and ex-wife were hit by a car as pedestrians at a crosswalk. My oldest son sustained severe brain damage as a result of the accident while my ex-wife and youngest son miraculously walked away with minor injuries. This would be my “it” and as I helped my son for the next several years get back on his feet, I was exposed to a whole new world that I had no idea existed. I feel this last statement must ring true for anyone with a child discovering the vast support networks that exist for the people we love who may have challenges. Despite my immense gratitude for these support systems, I would be remiss to say that prior to the accident I was anything other than “ignorant” of how much effort goes into helping so many people.

During that first year, my son had extremely intense therapies, which occupied many hours of the week. As I helped my boy work through and attend his many sessions I learned an incredible amount. When speaking of my son learning to walk again, I once heard a physiotherapist say “we won’t bring his foot to the ground, we will bring the ground to his foot.” This single sentence changed everything for me and became the cornerstone for how I would develop adapted music programs for people who might have challenges similar to my son. In 2015 I had a meeting in the music room of CLO where I presented about 4,000 ideas followed by a



truthful admission of “I have no idea if any of this is going to work, but if you’ll give me a chance - I would really like to try.” Over the years my role at CLO has changed many times, I have been given new challenges, new responsibilities and have had to reinvent what I do almost constantly. Despite all of that change, one aspect that has remained a constant since that meeting is the support that I have received from CLO. No matter how extreme or elaborate the idea I have suggested, these ideas have only ever been met with support and enthusiasm. This confidence has allowed me to work with so many people and has provided me the opportunity to develop programs for everyone - regardless of their support needs.

As a cause of my son’s journey and his achievements, I see him in every single person supported at CLO. I know that whatever we need to do is possible because my boy would do it. I know that it doesn’t matter how you get “from A to B” or how long it takes. I also know that it is much more important to believe that you will get “from A to B” than it is to inevitably complete the journey. I am humbled to say that I’ve lost count of the number of times I have screamed “yes!” or “just had something in my eye” when one of someone supported has played, or sang or done something that is very meaningful to them. I celebrate every little success, because even the smallest ones are so, so important. It is through those successes I make it a mission never to lose sight of why I do what I am doing, or forget to be grateful for the opportunity I have been given.

Community Living Oakville would like to thank Ryan for his dedication, passion and unending creativity. The partnership between CLO and Ryan has evolved over time, and the possibilities continue to be endless. Ryan makes people smile, and helps their appreciation for music grow. Since working with Community Connect Ryan has had the opportunity to impact even more people we support and grow his musical community. Ryan always goes above and beyond for the people he supports either through teaching, mentoring, coaching or just helping people fall in love with music. He’s supported people who have never sung before to sing with laughter and happiness!

*“Ryan is dedicated, inspiring and always encourages me to work on my musical abilities.”*

## REMEMBERING CAROLINE GEDEON

On Friday January 6, 2023, Caroline Gedeon passed away peacefully at Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital. Caroline, beloved sister of Bernice and Richard, had received support from Community Living Oakville from 1989 – 2014. Although time had passed since Caroline was actively supported by CLO, those who knew her shared wonderful stories and memories.

## SEASON OF GIVING



Thank you to our compassionate community for your support during the holiday season. We are excited to announce that our **2022 Holiday Appeal Campaign raised \$73,500!** Thanks to your generosity, you made certain that we continue to deliver the programs and services the people we support rely on to enjoy enriched, fulfilled and connected lives.

**Jean Robitaille & Joanne Aubin through the Robitaille Charitable Foundation** generously matched \$25,000 of gifts received from #GivingTuesday to the end of December and you ensured that in the season of giving every dollar was matched!

Thanks to your generosity, these funds will provide Community Living Oakville the opportunity to directly support training initiatives for both people supported and staff. As a progressive agency, we value education and development that is accessible to all, in order to enhance the quality of lives of people supported. Providing training gives each person supported opportunities to learn skills and gain education to live more independently, as well as training for staff to build their skill sets in order to provide better quality of service.

As always, we want to express our sincere appreciation to the friends, families and supporters of Community Living Oakville who have contributed in many ways and make a significant difference. Cheers to an incredible 2023!

## THANK YOU TO OUR HOLIDAY MATCH CAMPAIGN DONORS

Ainslie Baillie  
 Ammar Aljoundi  
 Anne Dean  
 Anthony Kimmel  
 Balogh Family Foundation  
 Barbara Furlong  
 Carolyn McCleister  
 Chris Jay  
 Chris Vollmershausen  
 Darren Lawless  
 David White  
 Deborah McKibbon  
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 Randy Lalonde  
 Robert and Jennifer Doyle  
 Roseanne Elliott  
 Roy Chard  
 Scott Hobson  
 Shannon Coles  
 Sharon and Paul Barley  
 Steve Campbell  
 The WB Family Foundation  
 Thomas Gregory  
 Wendy Schrader  
 Winston Mark

# EMPOWERED

With support, Edith completed the three E's - Education, Exploration and Experience - in her journey to becoming more independent and confident in herself through a skill she has always wanted to learn: self defense.

**Education:** Find courage, stay committed and follow through with learning about self-defense.

**Exploration:** Find a local organization where she would be able to participate in a Women's self-defense course.



**Experience:** Edith found OCTA Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. The organization offered 2 complementary classes to see if the class was a good fit and Edith signed herself up. The class consisted of 8-10 women and a female instructor. When Edith and staff arrived, they were greeted warmly by the owner and given an introduction to the members, instructors and layout of the program. As the class began, it became apparent that the class setting was not for Edith and that 1:1 sessions would be more beneficial for her; however, the cost of private self-defense classes was high and was not something that Edith would be able to afford.

Edith's journey with this goal looked to be ending; however, with the funds raised through the 2022 Golf Tournament in support of individuals in CLO's Supported Independent Living Program, the goal that seemed unreachable, became a reality. Edith would soon be engrossed in a multi-disciplinary study of awareness, de-escalation and self-protection.

Edith has remained faithful in attending classes and has developed a deep connection with her instructor who was once a police officer. His insights on protecting herself and empowering her self-confidence have been life affirming for Edith. She has learned about the early signs of trouble and how to engage in action to get to safety such as de-escalating tensions and moving out of harm's way, to using a firm and commanding voice to alert others around the surrounding areas and to defending herself. Edith has greatly enjoyed these sessions and hopes to continue in the near future.

# FAMILY CORNER

**Keep up to date with sector updates, agency communications and new initiatives!**

- We celebrated National Non-Profit Appreciation Week February 13th - 17th.
- Have you made your submission to our #TaglineCampaign? Check out our social channels [@communitylivingoakville](https://www.instagram.com/communitylivingoakville).
- Keep a lookout for the next Family Roundtable session in May!
- May is Community Living Month - stay tuned.

If you have any questions about upcoming events, reach out to Andrea Interior, Development Manager, at [andrea.interior@oakcl.org](mailto:andrea.interior@oakcl.org).

## WE'RE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers selflessly offer their time towards enhancing the lives of people we support.

Volunteering is good for your body and soul. It encourages physical activity, lowers your blood pressure, promotes heart health and extends your life. Here are a few mental and emotional benefits of volunteering:

1. Increases your social connections and decreases feelings of loneliness
2. Allows you to contribute to a cause
3. Motivates you to get out of the house and see the world
4. Connects you to the community
5. Reduces depression and stress
6. Improves self-confidence
7. Boosts your happiness
8. Encourages learning

Community Living Oakville could not achieve our mission without the contributions from our volunteers and we thank them for their time and commitment.

We call upon family members, students, and members of the community who wish to be more involved with CLO and who would like to make a difference in the lives of people we support.

There are many different volunteer opportunities to consider:

- Mentoring a person we support
- Facilitating activities of interest, such as teaching someone a new skill
- Participating in recreation & leisure activities
- Transportation support
- Preparing & facilitating upcoming events
- Assisting with fundraising initiatives
- Becoming a CLO ambassador by engaging with community members to promote CLO

Have a great idea? We would love to hear from you!

Contact Shannon Douglas, Engagement & Training Coordinator, at [shannon.douglas@oakcl.org](mailto:shannon.douglas@oakcl.org).

**“TOO OFTEN WE UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A TOUCH,  
A SMILE, A KIND WORD, A LISTENING EAR, AN HONEST  
COMPLIMENT, OR THE SMALLEST ACT OF CARING, ALL OF  
WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO TURN A LIFE AROUND.”**

**– LEO BUSCAGLIA**

# WELLNESS RETREAT: A JOURNEY TO SELF-CARE

A lot of people have been feeling overwhelmed with the fast pace of life and sometimes struggle to find time for self-care. Women we support at CLO in particular have talked about wanting to do something to improve their mental health and overall well-being. So, we thought, why not do a wellness retreat?



A retreat focused on self-care, that connects women with other women, works on lifting each other up, and that provides a sense of belonging and empowerment.

Collaborating with Lori from Fun Fearless Females, we created a Wellness Retreat for the women supported by CLO, which was held once a month over a three-month period. Lori created a peaceful and rejuvenating environment where women focused on their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. She created a space that people felt comfortable in to be themselves and that fostered the building of friendships.

At this wellness retreat, people had the opportunity to engage in various activities that promoted mindfulness, healthy eating, emotional management, and journaling.

One of the key elements and most talked about session was mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to the practice of being present in the moment and paying attention to one's thoughts, feelings, and surroundings. During this retreat, people were taught how to relax, calm the mind, and focus on the present moment.

The Wellness Retreat we created for the women at Community Living Oakville was an amazing start to their journey towards self-care. We look forward to hosting these workshops on a much larger scale in the future, so stay tuned for more information!

Trust us - your mind, body and soul will thank you!

For more information on Fun Fearless Females and what Lori has to offer:



- Visit [www.funfearlessfemales.ca](http://www.funfearlessfemales.ca)
- Email [lori@funfearlessfemales.ca](mailto:lori@funfearlessfemales.ca)
- Facebook [@funfearlessfemales1](https://www.facebook.com/funfearlessfemales1)
- Instagram [@funfearlessfemales](https://www.instagram.com/funfearlessfemales)



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## DESIREE DOSSANTOS



You may think someone who has been a long-standing employee of Community Living Oakville might fall under the stigma of being resistant to growth and change within their role. That is certainly not the case with Desiree Dossantos. Desiree has worked at Community Living Oakville for 14 years and she continues to look for innovative ways to provide quality supports and improve on her skills as a Direct Support Professional.

The story of how Desiree first became involved with Community Living Oakville started with a walk on her lunch break and a life-changing conversation with Shannon Coles, Director of Human Resources. Desiree had been working at a Finance agency in the building across the road from our main office. She would often look out her office window, watching the hustle and bustle of life within CLO, curious about the agency. One day on her lunch break, she walked into the office and spoke with Shannon about the agency, the type of supports provided, and how one would get into the

field of Developmental Services. Desiree left feeling utterly inspired. She felt this was her calling and where she could truly have a positive impact on people's lives. She decided to make a life-altering decision and change her career trajectory by enrolling in Humber College's Social Service Worker Program. She completed her student placement at one of CLO's Day Service locations and quickly applied to join the team as a Direct Support Professional.

Desiree has worked at a number of locations throughout the years but found her stride and passion with her most recent move to support Annie, Michelle, Robin, Uli, and Stella. Desiree said ***"I love coming into work every day and seeing their smiling faces. They greet me with such positivity and inspire me to want to do better in my role. I am always striving to provide the people I support with the tools to live an independent life, be more involved in their community, and achieve their dreams."***

Desiree's manager, Rose Agbor, jumped at the chance to highlight the amazing work Desiree has done. "Desiree joined the team last year at a time that someone supported was struggling with the loss of her mother and consistent staff support. Desiree demonstrated core competence of compassion and empathy. She strongly advocated for the person supported to get the right support needed in order for her to cope with her grief. Desiree should be proud of the work she does, the person she is, and the difference she makes in the lives of the people she provides support."

Further recognition of Desiree's hard work came from Nazeem Lahashmi, Director of Services. "Desiree has demonstrated a number of the core competencies over the past year. She has fostered independence with Robin and Annie and has advocated for all of the women to be a part of their home and community. Since Desiree joined the team she has helped the women we support achieve our organizational outcomes such as: citizenship, individuality, accountability, quality and progressiveness.



Some examples of this would be Desiree assisting the women go to the spa and get manicures and pedicures, helping equip them to travel on their own, and becoming a huge Argos fan through attending games. Desiree also believes in collaboration and teamwork. She has worked diligently with her team to provide continuous and quality care. Desiree has demonstrated various skills in supporting people to achieve their goals and dreams. “

When Desiree is not working, she enjoys spending time with her family. She has 3 children and 2 grandchildren, whom she adores. Her family lovingly calls her “Wonder Woman” and she has proven to be just that. She also enjoys spending time outdoors - whether it’s enjoying time at the cottage or camping with her family, she is most at home in the outdoors with the people she loves.

Desiree, on behalf of Community Living Oakville, thank you for all you do and for always MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

# ONE THING I LOVE ABOUT MY JOB

*"I love my job because I am able to put a smile on people's faces every day."  
-Cheryl Henderson*

"I have many reasons why I love my job. I have the privilege of supporting others to reach their goals while keeping their independence and dignity intact. I can make a difference in a person's life while supporting them in connecting and adding value to their community. I have the opportunity every day to learn from those I support. My job has allowed me to lead a compassionate and fulfilling life which I am grateful for. I truly love my job for the positive difference I can make in someone’s life every day, and for the limitless appreciation I receive in return."  
- Danielle H

*"My job as a frontline staff is rewarding and at the end of the day I feel that  
I have made a difference! "  
- Desiree Dossantos*

"I enjoy helping people discover new skills and reach their potential. It is incredibly rewarding to see them reach milestones that many thought were impossible."  
- Violet Soman

## DARLENE BRYANS – I’M LOVING IT!

In 1991 Darlene Bryans purchased her first McDonald’s franchise, located at 210 North Service Road in Oakville. Since then, Darlene has expanded and purchased a variety of McDonald’s locations within Oakville including the stores at Lakeshore Road, Neyagawa, Glen Abbey, and Bronte.

In 2011, Darlene hired a person supported by Community Living Oakville’s Xplore Employment Program, and a partnership lasting over a decade was created.

Darlene is passionate about her community and providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. She has provided long term employment opportunities for many people supported, including Joel Layne who has been a valuable member of her team for over 8 years.

Ronald Copeland had been out of the workforce for many years, and together with his Xplore Employment job coach, Ronald began his journey back to employment. Through career exploration, skills assessments and job preparation-related workshops, Ronald applied, interviewed and was recently hired at one of Darlene’s locations. Ronald is currently working 4 days a week in the kitchen, cooking french fries and burgers, and is thriving at his job!



“I enjoy working at McDonald’s a lot! Darlene is very nice and I am happy to work for her!” – Ronald Copeland.

Darlene has provided a supportive, inclusive work environment for multiple people we support and Xplore Employment looks forward to continuing the partnership with her for years to come.

If you are an employer looking to hire, please contact Andrea Lee, Manager of Xplore Employment, at [andrea.lee@oakcl.org](mailto:andrea.lee@oakcl.org) and check out our website at [www.xploreemployment.com](http://www.xploreemployment.com)



“Darlene is very approachable. She gives me motivational chats before every shift. It is surreal working at the best McDonald’s location ever!”

– Joel Layne

# END OF AN ERA



A few years ago, our day service location in downtown Oakville at 147 Church Street was sold; however, due to the pandemic, we were fortunate to continue to use this location for Xcel, the fee for service program, much longer than we anticipated. But, as the saying goes, 'all good things must come to an end', and as of January 1, 2023, we officially moved out, handed over the keys to the new owners, and locked up for the last time.

It is the end of an era for Community Living Oakville, the many people supported, and

the employees who have walked through those doors over the last 45+ years! I had mentioned to many people that there was an interesting silence that came over me standing in the empty building. As we shut off the lights for the last time, I thought, 'if only these walls could talk'.

Xcel has now moved a couple blocks south, into an actual Church! The new location is at Knox Presbyterian Church, located at 89 Dunn Street. It has been a great opportunity to partner with Knox Presbyterian Church, and with the location still downtown, we are able to access all the vibrant shops, stores, parks and paths. Onwards to the next chapter!

# A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

Last December, Katherine, Kaitlin, Satwinder, Erin along with their friends enjoyed a night out in downtown Toronto. Starting with a luxury limousine, they arrived in style for dinner at The Old Spaghetti Factory in the private Crystal Room and were treated to some specially planned surprises along the way! Thanks to the Hnatiw and Thomson families for putting together a fabulous special evening for the people we support.



# THE SPARK

Have you ever experienced an ‘aha’ moment, a flash of insight, a sudden realization, or an idea that just clicks? It’s like a spark that catches fire inside and moves you to action. There’s a point every year in Project SEARCH where we see this happening with the interns and it’s an exciting time for everyone. In this fourth year of Project SEARCH, we’ve become more attuned to when these moments appear as the interns become more familiar and comfortable in new surroundings and with new people. Some moments are more subtle than others, but we see them in words, in body language, a look in the eye, or a changed attitude toward self and others.

Recently, a spark of realization was evident when Israel made changes to how he picks items in the Medical Device Reprocessing department. Skills trainers might teach a specific method but then they get to watch as an intern, like Israel did, and realize it also works in reverse or even from the middle and working outward. These moments are breakthroughs in understanding complex concepts. All approaches might work equally but the intern will use the one that works best for them.



These sparks of understanding are moments of clarity, it can be a small epiphany that sheds light on confusing information, leading to greater understanding, and sometimes it happens fast. Punna, interning in food services, very quickly grasped her new role where she is required to make quick decisions regarding waste, recycling, and reprocessing in a noisy fast-paced environment. There is an established process involved to be proficient and Punna experienced a quick succession of moments of understanding and as a result was provided the opportunity to learn additional duties to maximize skill development in an internship.

A flash of insight happened recently when Brandon, who is working in mail services, wanted more responsibility in his internship and was open to trying new things. This insight became a reality when Brandon was given a new project to work on that provided him with new learning opportunities. Flashes of insight like this can spark excitement resulting from problem-solving, creativity, and learning.

Such sparks of opportunity occur when we embrace a situation that presents a new window for advancement or progress. After only a couple of weeks in his new Waste & Linen internship, Owen asked coworkers if they were hiring. He's enjoying his work more than expected and can envision himself working here long-term. He recognized the potential opportunity and was excited to learn he could qualify with his current education.

Some of the greatest moments we see are the profound realizations that, "I can do this". Sometimes an intern simply assumes they can't do something or were told by others that they can't. But Project SEARCH challenges these assumptions and interns continuously break through perceived barriers and find that renewed spark of hope with each new accomplishment.

Examples of these moments are nearly endless and can involve the development in perception, memory, and problem-solving skills. It often includes physical abilities such as muscle coordination and dexterity. Learning can be conscious or unconscious, and can occur through observation, practice, and instruction. All of these are foundational to Project SEARCH so the scope of learning potential is wide and the 'aha' moments frequent both in-class and on the job.

We've reached the point in the year where we have seen great growth in the interns. We can see sparks combining with other sparks and fueling the fire of positive expectations, outcomes, and creating a determination to overcome obstacles. Moments of realization. Renewed hope. Seizing opportunity. Eureka moments in learning. A spring in the step and a desire to be here. The sparks become essential skills for employment and the skills open doors of possibility for the future.

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