



# ANNUAL REPORT 2015

SUPPORTING ADULTS AND  
CHILDREN WITH AUTISM  
FOR OVER FORTY YEARS





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# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY SECTION



# CEO MESSAGE



Jessica Zufall, Ph.D. Chief Executive Officer

In this 2015 annual report, you will read about SCFU's new programs, its finances, and plans for our 40th year and beyond. What hasn't changed, and won't change, is our, and my, dedication to our mission: promoting an independent and productive life for people with Autism. No program, no staff member, no facility, exists here without an understanding and adherence to that mission. Families entrust us with the well-being and care of their own, and we have a strict duty to maintain that trust. I came to SCFU three years ago, and I can tell you that we, daily, fulfill that duty. With dedicated hard work, devotion to personal care, and an eye for innovation, we serve more than 300 individuals. Is it serious work? Yes - but with joy. Creative expression thrives at SCFU. Enjoy our Sing For Autism concert. Catch the waves with our Kristen Bednar Memorial Surf Camp. Watch the budding chess masters in our Chess program. Yes, 2015 has come and gone with numerous firsts, but rest assured that into our 40th year and beyond, the bedrock of our mission remains firmly in place. It is my honor to serve as the CEO of this wonderful agency, and I continue to find inspiration in the faces of the men and women we support. Some of the highlights of this past year include:

- Launched the Therapeutic Outreach Uniting Community Health (TOUCH) website – N.Y.'s First Direct Access Application for people with disabilities, families, advocates and professionals.
- Continued to embrace Person-Centered Planning with our Council on Quality and Leadership Ambassador Group
- Continued to have deficiency-free program audits from OPWDD.
- Held the 9th Annual Kristen Bednar Memorial Surf Camp for Children with Autism supporting over 100 children with Autism in Westhampton.
- Opened a new group home in the Bronx to support four men from the Brooklyn Developmental Center.
- We successfully converted our first group home in Cortlandt Manor from an Intermediate Care Facility to an Individual Residential Alternative.
- Launched our first ever Self Advocacy Group and officers were elected.
- Enriched our already robust social media presence by launching the #AskmeaboutAutism and #SingforAutism campaigns, creating our own YouTube channel and joining Instagram.
- Were awarded part of OPWDD's initiative to move people out of the Bernard Fineson Developmental Center in Queens into group homes in the community.
- Were approved to open our first Medically Frail group home for four men in the Bronx.
- Created the Inclusive Housing Model that will have two people without disabilities residing in a home with two women with Autism we support in an apartment setting.
- Hosted the first annual Autism Sings Concert in Yonkers.
- Created our parent Newsletter, The Scoop.
- Increased our profile with radio spots to support World Autism Acceptance Month and Day.

## MISSION/HISTORY



Special Citizens Futures Unlimited has a tenaciously dedicated group of parents to thank for its origins. Those dedicated parents of "Special Citizens" came together in 1976 to form our agency in an effort to advocate for ongoing adult programs for their children who had aged out of Special Education services and had little or no options for long-term housing or day programming. Nothing stops parents who advocate for their children, and as a result, with a three-year grant from the then OMRDD (now OPWDD), Special Citizens opened its first group home in Westchester (Cortland Intermediate Care Facility) on December 7, 1981. New facilities emerged over the years, as Special Citizens stayed ahead of the curve. Times and treatments were changing. Behavioral therapy and controlled learning environments emerged as primary treatments for many forms of Autism. Special Citizens was perfectly positioned to foster that change. As SCFU approaches its 40th anniversary in 2016, we acknowledge our gratitude to those courageous parents who started it all. Their desire for a loving and caring environment for their family members lives on at SCFU.



## HUMAN INTEREST STORY - **ADAM AS A TESTER**

Before we launched our landmark TOUCH website service in April, we put it through its paces. No software or website should go live without rigorous "road tests." One individual at SCFU was the right man for the job. Adam Lieberman graduated from Queens College with a BA in Computer Science. That training, and, to put it plainly, Adam's "smarts" perfectly suited him to the task. Right off the bat, Senior TOUCH Developer, Gerry Libertelli, started hearing from Adam: "I started to get testing results from Adam. What impressed me about his work was that it was detailed-oriented." Libertelli described Adam's test results as "better than professional testers." Toiling away, Adam was able to find errors on the new-user sign-up form. "You never want to give up a user on the Internet. It is very valuable to have a user come to your site and sign up," says Libertelli. "The net result of Adam's testing was that we were able to launch with a solid sign-up system. I absolutely think Adam could work in this business. I see no difference in what Adam did for me in an email, compared to what a professional tester does." Lieberman stated, "It is an honor to be an individual receiving services from TOUCH, and to be selected to help test the site." Adam Lieberman is truly a special citizen and proof positive that people with Autism have what it takes to excel in work and life -- given the opportunity. Is that any different from the rest of us? To see the results of Adam's road tests, visit the TOUCH site at <http://www.touchnys.org/public/>



# EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH **DISABILITIES**

Looking for a full-time job? Having an internship can usually put you in the right place at the right time. It did for David Berger-Gross, who recently landed a position at the Manhattan real estate firm, Atmack. David took part in our Emmons Hiller Supported Employment Program, which gave him the "ready-to-work" skills he needed. David's success affirms SCFU's "step-by-step" approach to preparing individuals for the world of work. A job coach helps with individuals to help them build relationships, build a resume, and improve interview skills. When an internship or job opening becomes available, the job coach shadows the individual. The ultimate goal is, long-term placement. Individuals like David aren't the only

one who benefits when they get a job. Companies discover, to their delight, that people they hire with special abilities typically become some of the most reliable, trustworthy, and dedicated people in their employ. And, the financial "icing on the cake" is that the for-profit companies can also take advantage of tax incentives by hiring these individuals. President Obama proclaimed October 2015 as "National Disability Employment Awareness Month." 2015 was also the 25th anniversary of the passage of the "Americans with Disabilities Act." The world is changing for the better and SCFU continues to support and champion individuals with Autism, who consistently prove they have "special abilities."



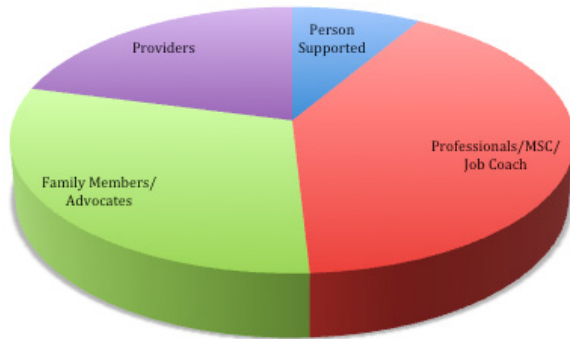
# SECTION 2: PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS





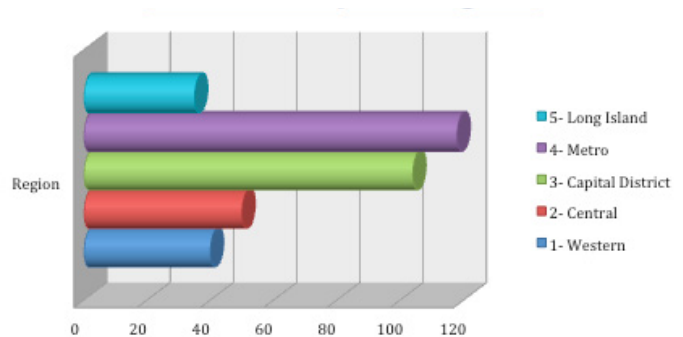
# TOUCH

## T.O.U.C.H. Registration by User



TOUCH has experienced great success since its release in the spring and has been working diligently to create enhancements to the application, based on feedback from its users. Through the application, people and their families can locate service providers and can begin to engage, locate employment through our highly efficient partnership with Simply Hired, communicate directly with their Job Coach and locate and attend events that are being hosted by New York State Providers. The application also provides the capability to save jobs of interest, events you would like to attend and to catalogue providers a person is interested in learning more about.

## Providers per Region



TOUCH continues to engage with Agnostech Systems, a web development company that has not only embraced the mission of Special Citizens, but the spirit of the grant and the mutual belief in direct access for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Gerry Libertelli, owner of Agnostech Systems has worked closely with the people we support, their families and industry professionals to test the TOUCH application and has provided an experience that in some instances has helped them make their own career choices.

"The original launch of TOUCH, in the spring, experienced great success and I am thrilled about the new revisions being released today. We have listened to what users need and what helps them as a person being supported or as a professional and it is our goal to continue to provide these enhancements to streamline access to the information needed," says Jessica Zufall-Guberman, CEO of Special Citizens, the host organization for TOUCH.



# SECTION 3: SCFU IN ACTION



## CQL AMBASSADORS



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**Alex DiMaio**

Alex is excited to be joining the Special Citizens Futures Unlimited team in an administrative capacity as the Statewide TOUCH Coordinator. Over the last ten years, Alex has worked within the nonprofit community as a Residential Manager and Program Director for Allegro Adult Services. While working within the nonprofit sector he has championed for individuals with autism and has shaped his team to provide quality services to educate and support persons who have Autism/PDD. Alex received a Bachelors of Science in Business from the University of Phoenix and is currently pursuing his Graduate Degree in Healthcare Administration. When he is not studying, Alex enjoys reading, running and spending time with his friends and family.

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**Margaret Buczynska**

Margaret has worked with Developmentally Disabled Children and Adults since 1985, in the capacity of School Psychologist, Psychotherapist, Behavioral Specialist and Administrator. Working with SCFU since 2002, Margaret has served as an Applied Behavior Science Specialist (ABSS); 2005 – 2007 Quality Assurance Director; 2007 – 2012 Westchester Regional Director; since October 2012 Director of Quality Assurance/Supervisor for Behavior Support Team, Training and Investigation Departments. When not working at SCFU I am engaged in the SGI Buddhist Organization and Energy Work based on the Medicine Wheel and Shamanic Tradition of Native North and South Americans. Margaret loves to dance.

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**Jessica Zufall**

Jessica has been the CEO of Special Citizens since 2012 and it was one of her organizational goals to help bring the agency through the Council on Quality and Leadership accreditation process, which happened in September of 2014. Jess travels throughout the organization to directly train all levels of staff, managers, direct support professionals and executive management on embracing a person-centered planning and outcomes model. Jess along with the Director of QA and Compliance Officer monitor the agency's progress on CQL goals and outcomes and reports back to CQL on all progress. The Council on Quality and Leadership has been a leader in working with human service organizations and systems to continuously define, measure and improve the quality of life for all people.

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# AMBASSADORS



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**Rosalind McAllister**

Rosalind McAllister arrived at Special Citizens over a decade ago-landing first as a Consultant, then moving forward as Manager of WOWY Gallery, Manhattan. Following this was Work Readiness Supervisor, then Pre-Vocational Supervisor. As Pre-Vocational develops into a first rate program under Katrina Potter, Rosalind has transitioned to doing that which means the most to her-working closely with the men and women of Pre-Vocational, preparing them for their next great adventure; employment (or further employment) and independent living. Rosalind also assists with the Special Citizens Newsletter, The SCOOP!

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**Jennifer Patuleia**

Jennifer holds a certification in Microsoft applications and a Bachelors of Science from Charter Oaks State College in Early Childhood Education as well as an Associates degree in Science from Middlesex County College. Jennifer spent years at local YMCA's as a Camp Counselor. She spent a few summers working directly for the Superintendent of Stoneham Public Schools as the secretary. Jennifer was on the student government for the Allen Institute, which was run by Easter Seals in Connecticut. Jennifer has been receiving services from SCFU for many years and lives independently in her own apartment.

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**David Alvarenga**

Prior to arriving at Special Citizens, I worked 16 years in the field of retail and management. I began working for Special Citizens in October 2010 as a part time driver. A few weeks later, I was asked to stay and work with the men and women we support as a Direct Support Professional. In 2013, I was promoted into the Recreational assistant position. In 2015, I was promoted into my current position as Development Associate.

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## SELF-ADVOCACY **GROUP**

**The world is starting to view people, not just with Autism, but also with any disability, as full members of society.**



"My peers appreciate me, and believe that I can work hard for their rights." That proud statement could be heard from any leader who advocates for the people he represents. In this case, however, that particular leader is one of Special Citizen's own: David Blau is the President of the new Self-Advocacy Group. David and three other individuals now have the responsibility of speaking out and advocating for their peers in the group homes and Day Habilitation programs. Charles Jansco is Vice President, and states clearly what he likes to see: "I would like to go on more trips, walks, along with making friends in the community." Sheila Hill is Secretary, and Zachary Lewis is Treasurer. The leaders were all chosen by popular vote at the group homes where they reside. Self-Advocacy Groups are integral to the practice of Person Centered Planning, which Special Citizens embraces. Underlying the practice of respect for any individual's desire, and need to share in the planning of his or her future. The process focuses on the individual's personal values, strengths, needs, and desired outcomes. The world is starting to view people, not just with Autism, but also with any disability, as full members of society. We are moving from simple "awareness" to inclusion. All of us, including everyone with a disability, deserve a seat at the table. David and his fellow advocates are part of something much bigger than they may realize.



# DSP/TRAINING



Direct. Support. Professional. Those three words perfectly describe the work our amazing "DSP's" perform 24/7 for the Special Citizens individuals. They provide crucial hands-on care that makes a difference in the lives of the people they serve. They are professionals. Special Citizens continually works with DSP's to provide skill enhancement. We recently partnered with Relias Learning to develop comprehensive online training options for our DSP's. Through this system, Special Citizens can also extend training services to sister agencies. This shared experience enhances knowledge transfer and improves the care we provide.

Through our training programs, DSP's learn to embrace the seven core competencies of their profession:

- putting people first
- building and maintaining relationships
- demonstrating professionalism
- supporting good health
- supporting safety
- having a home
- being active and productive in society

The men and women we support rely on our front-line DSP's to provide top-notch care. We make sure they have all the skills they need.

Thank you, DSP's, one and all.

## FROM INSTITUTION TO **INDEPENDENCE**



A room of one's own: independence in the community It's hard to fathom the scope of change that has taken place for people with disabilities since the curtain was pulled back more than forty years ago to reveal the shame at Willowbrook State School. For individuals with Autism, one of the great transformations has been the move towards community-based living. With the power of the Americans With Disabilities and The Olmstead Acts backing them, people with disabilities have found homes in our communities in independent living spaces. Special Citizens has been instrumental in moving people out of State-run institutions such as the Broome, Brooklyn, and Bernard Fineson, and into a variety of Individual Residential Alternatives (IRA's). Compared with congregate living situations, supervised or supported IRA's offer the individual privacy and community-based living. They are, truly, a room of one's own. Society is moving beyond simple awareness of Autism, and towards "inclusion" of all individuals. Being "included" in one's community is a benchmark of change.





# PREVOCATION COMMUNITY TRIPS AND **NEW REGULATIONS**

Prevocational services provide a key stepping stone on the path to independence. Individuals learn practical, technical skills, and gain essential social-interaction skills that will enable them to live richer lives in their communities. New OPWDD regulations in 2015 have emphasized the importance of community-based Prevocational services. Special Citizens' has partnered with local businesses in its community-based Prevocational efforts, and individuals have ventured out on numerous expeditions to groups such as Viola Chocolate Factory, and Custom Fabric Flowers by M&S Schmalberg. A visit to the NY Times factory is scheduled for early in 2016. At the Parkchester Library, our Prevocational participants engage in weekly computer training, which involves word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software training. And, of course, since the entire world uses iPads, so do our participants. Community-based Prevocational initiatives: one more way our special citizens can thrive.



# SECTION 4: COMMUNICATING THE SCFU MESSAGE



# #ASKMEABOUTAUTISM

#AskmeaboutAutism - Take it to the streets! If you or someone you know has Autism, you're probably well informed about the topic. But, how about the general public? How much do ordinary people walking down the streets of New York know about Autism? We decided to "take it the streets" with our intrepid video team and find out what we could learn and what "ordinary" citizens could teach us. The result is our new campaign, #AskmeaboutAutism." What did we find out?

First of all, there's compassion: Every person we spoke to, even if he or she did not have personal experience with Autism, expressed concern and compassion for our special citizens. Secondly, people are aware that early recognition and intervention are in everyone's best interest when it comes to Autism. Thirdly, moms rule: Mothers of

children with Autism have a special, exceptional bond with their child. They quickly become the experts and know what works and doesn't for their child. They also develop an admirable "go with the flow" approach to the challenges they face. Thank you, moms! The name of our campaign came about during one early interview, a mom (of course), with plenty of Bronx attitude, called out to our camera: "Ask me about Autism!" So, if we just happen to stop you on the street one day, take a moment and shout out "Ask me about Autism!".

For more information about our campaign visit [https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/askmeaboutautism?source=feed\\_text&story\\_id=10206146784482103](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/askmeaboutautism?source=feed_text&story_id=10206146784482103) #Askmeaboutautism





# JET BLUE

ID? Check. Ticket? Check. Boarding pass? Check. Air travel for anyone can be daunting these days. When you have Autism, it can be a real challenge. One of Special Citizen's individuals, Daniel, had a dream of visiting Disney World. That visit might have remained only a dream without the hands-on help of two amazing airport employees. Terence Skeete and Veda Simmons of JetBlue heard about Daniel's ambition, and decided to make sure everything went like clockwork.

## Service above and beyond



Daniel and his Behavioral Aid, Ben, showed up at the airport at the appointed hour and waiting for them were Terence and Veda. The pair shepherded Daniel through the terminal maze, made sure papers were in order, guided him through security, and in so many ways, eased the burden. According to Daniel's aid, Ben, "As a result of these efforts, which we did

not specifically request, Daniel was able to enjoy his flight, and an awesome vacation in Disney World." Special Citizens has awarded Terence and Veda with a special commendation for their selfless support. Service above and beyond: That's what it is all about for JetBlue and Special Citizens.

# SURF CAMP

Waves glisten, surf crashes, sand swirls around your feet. Is this heaven? No, this must be the Kristen Bednar Memorial Surf Camp. What started as a simple outing to the beach in 2007 to dip some toes in the water, has grown into a major "cowabunga" day at the beach for more than 120 kids with Autism, who enjoy free one-on-one surfing instruction. Families plan their vacations around this day-long event at Cupsogue Beach in Westhampton, which not only introduces kids to the joys of riding the waves, but also turns out to be an exceptional form of aquatic therapy.

How so? Aside from the obvious benefit of physical exercise that surfing brings, the children benefit from the sense of accomplishment balancing on the board brings, without stress or expectations. In other words, they can achieve and still have fun. The looks on the faces of the kids, as they paddle back to shore, prove that! The next Surf Camp takes place on Saturday, August 13, 2016. To be part of this most excellent adventure, check out this link:

<http://www.specialcitizens.org/surf-camp.html>



## UNITED NATIONS – JOHN HARTMAN **SPEECH**



The United Nations announced a "call to action" to employers this past April 2, as part of "World Autism Awareness Day." The event was labeled "Employment: The Autism Advantage" and was intended to demonstrate that people with Autism can be valued employees and what it takes to create work environments where they can excel. Speakers included notables such as the Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, the Governor of Delaware, Jack Markell and one of Special Citizen's own: John Hartman. John, who lives in a Special Citizens IRA, also happens to

be a gifted artist and musician. And, he's got a job. During the UN session, Autism At Work, John captivated the audience as he talked about the influence his parents have had on his art, and what it means to be employed as a person with Autism. This year's Awareness Day underscored the growing understanding that independent living, gainful employment, and self-direction create more meaningful lives for people with Autism, and at the same time have a positive "ripple effect" throughout our communities. Well done, John!

# SECTION 5: AGENCY PROFILE

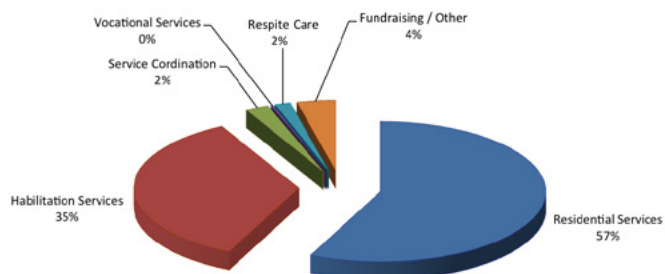




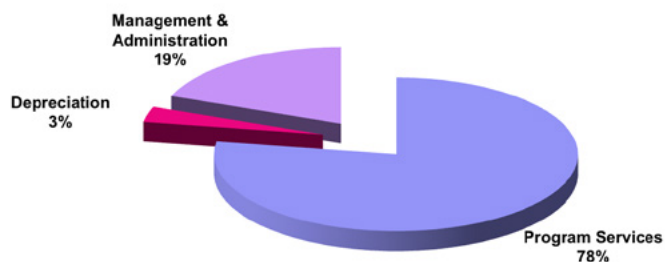
# FINANCIALS

## Special Citizens Futures Unlimited Statement of Activities Year Ended June 30, 2015

Medicaid revenue	10,225,942
Participation fees	508,846
Contributions	40,169
Other revenue	<u>792,365</u>
<b>Total revenue and support</b>	<b>11,567,322</b>
 Expenses	
Program services	9,371,572
Management and administration	<u>2,233,970</u>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>11,605,542</b>
 Change in net assets	(38,220)
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>2,249,203</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>2,210,983</u>



**Revenue 2014-2015**



**Expenditure 2014-2015**

These Financial Statements represent Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, Inc. Please contact Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, Inc. or the auditing firm of Withum Smith+Brown for more detailed financial statements



# COUNCIL ON QUALITY AND LEADERSHIP

A great wave of legislative and clinical changes has occurred recently for people with disabilities. We have seen movement away from institutional living and towards what is known as a "person-centered" approach. That approach focuses on and involves the individual in planning outcomes for the future, as well as encouraging community inclusion in housing and employment. Special Citizens backs those initiatives 110% and has earned a four-year accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL). CQL is the international accrediting and monitoring organization whose mission it is to improve the quality of services and supports for people with disabilities and people with mental illness. CQL guidelines involve clearly defined standards and include programs such as Basic Assurances and Personal Outcomes. Special Citizens applies all those standards in the breadth of its services. As a result, not only has the agency earned high marks from CQL on compliance, but the individuals we serve benefit from the most up-to-date social and clinical practices in the field. Person-centered is not just a buzzword at Special Citizen. It is our benchmark.



# LEADERSHIP



I believe in direct access for all people, specifically for people with developmental disabilities. I truly believe our services revolutionize the way people with developmental disabilities integrate into the communities in which they live, work and play. Every day, we are watching the people we support self-direct the course of their own lives and making their own dreams come true. I can't think of anything more rewarding than that.

***Jessica Zufall-Guberman, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer***



The far reaching benefits that a strong compliance department affords the people we support, compels me to carefully evaluate every new situation I encounter to ensure that I am doing everything I can to promote their safety and well-being from crafting smart policies and procedures to adhering to the law.

***Kendall Johnson Chief Compliance Officer***



I get great satisfaction from my daily work at SCFU, knowing my days are filled with the opportunity to ensure, enrich and expand the lives of the men and women with Autism and other disabilities, that we support.

***Zelda D. Keaton Senior Director of Program Services***



Supporting people with disabilities in my capacity as a CPO for Special Citizens Futures Unlimited is not just a career, it's my passion.

***Pravin Mascarenhas Chief Programs Officer***

# LEADERSHIP



Each person deserves the life he/she imagines. My mission is to support people on their way to achieving it.

***Margaret Buczynska Chief Clinical Officer***



Making sure the organization is able to support this great group of people, on a daily basis, is what motivates me to do my job.

***John Miles, MBA Chief Financial Officer***



I enjoy having the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the individuals that we support and teaching them various life skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.

***Tristan Stovall Media Coordinator***



Our greatest assets are our people. We need to remember that we must embrace them, teach them, and build them up. Learning what special qualities they possess to pass along to our individuals creates a pipeline of talent that accentuates our mission.

***Melissa Frisina, PHR, SHRM-CP Chief Administrative Officer***

# LEADERSHIP



Our significant change is not found in addressing a disability, but in promoting social capital, which will change attitudes, assumptions, and promote greater opportunities.

***Alex DiMaio Director of Quality Assurance and Improvement***



I take pride in providing comprehensive services at Special Citizens. I enjoy helping the men and women we support to achieve their goals, thus guiding them to aspire to attain a better quality of life.

***Latina Ferrer Director of Day Habilitation and Recreation***



It is an honor to be a part of an agency that is true to its mission. Special Citizens continues to care for each individual through its person centered philosophy, which brings meaningful activities where individuals can embrace their community by the utilization of community resources and traveling to many wonderful destinations of their choices.

***Xian Edwards Director of Residential Services***



## BOARD OF **DIRECTORS**



**Victoria Berger-Gross**

President



**Joseph Patuleia**

Vice- President



**Rick Ritt**

Treasurer



**Bob Beaudet**

Secretary



**Bonnie Hiller**

Trustee

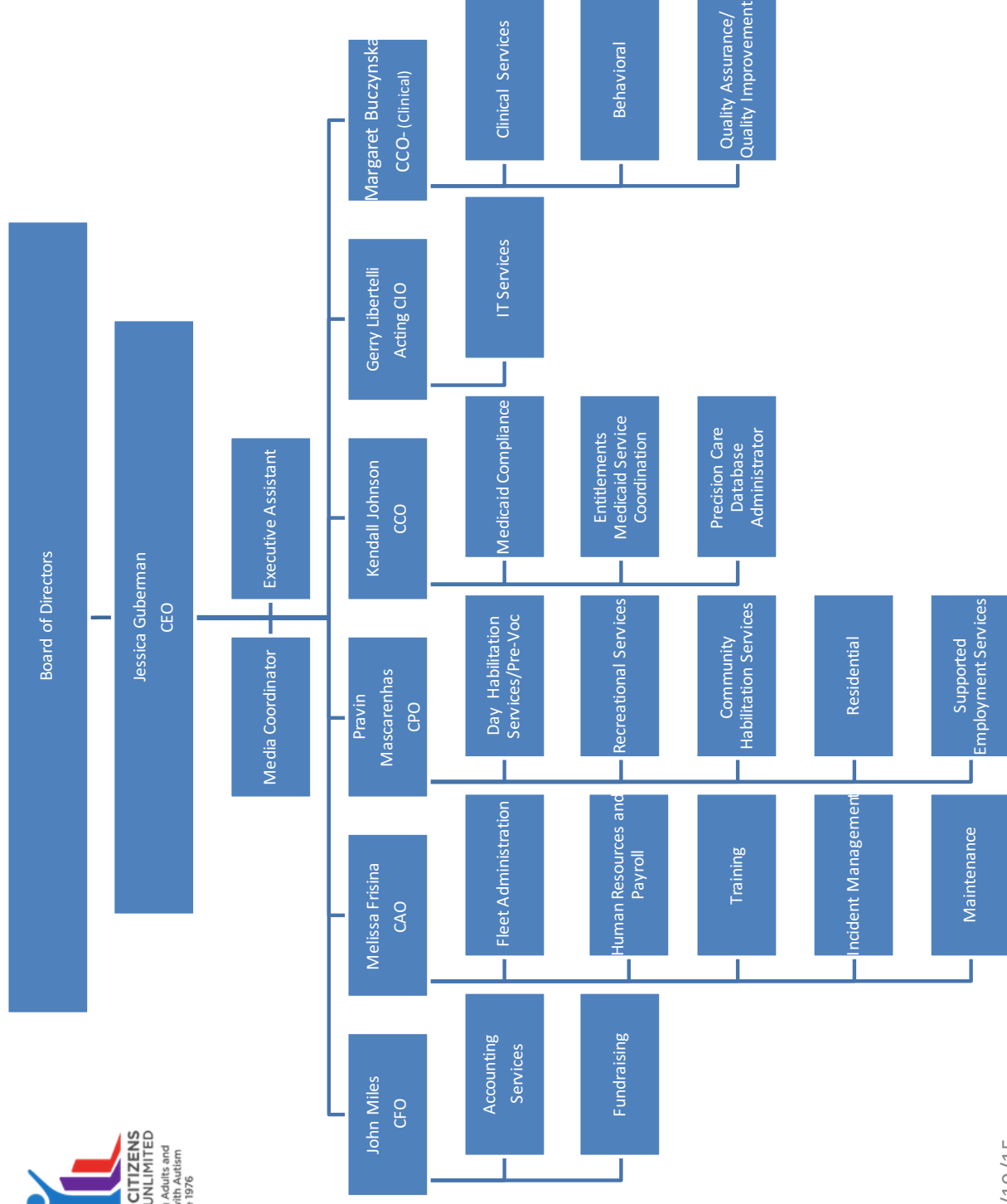


**Mike Brown**

Trustee



# SCFU ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



11/10/15



# SOCIAL MEDIA SITES



Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/>



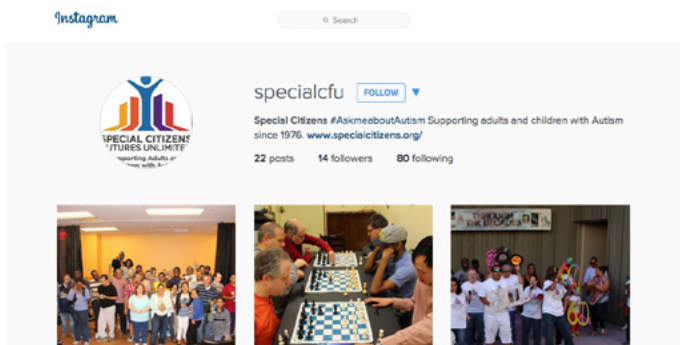
Instagram

<https://instagram.com/specialcfu/>



Twitter

<https://twitter.com/specialcitizens>



YouTube

<http://bitly.com/SpecialCitizensYouTube>

